

Story

Harry's fifth year at Hogwarts school of Witchcraft and Wizardry had ended very badly. A week before his friends had been injured or worse in the Department of Mysteries.

With the intentionally intimidating words spoken to his legal guardians, the members of the Order of the Phoenix were pleased with themselves and went their separate ways, leaving Harry, the Dursleys and a few others standing outside the brick wall entrance to platform 9 $\frac{3}{4}$.

"We'll see you soon, Harry," said his friend Ron, as he and the Weasleys walked to the car that they were using.

Hermione was standing nearby with her parents slightly back, having witnessed the highly unpleasant scene.

"Wake up! Get a move on boy, before those freaks come back," growled Uncle Vernon giving him a shove. "Looks like we're stuck with you for another summer. Effing freaks, the whole lot of you. Why don't you go somewhere else?" Realizing that it was mostly a rhetorical question, he said, "Grab your stuff. Let's go now."

"No thanks," said Harry.

"What?" sputtered Vernon. He looked at the raven-haired teen like he'd never seen him before.

Harry replied, "No thanks. You can leave now. I won't be going back with you."

"But you have to," said Petunia.

Harry said to her, "No. I don't have to. Thanks. I'll find someplace else to stay for the summer. Goodbye. I'll call you if I need something."

"That suits us fine," said Petunia turning around. "We don't need you, you ungrateful freak." The Dursleys walked off without even saying goodbye.

Harry gave a small wave, "Bye."

More or less out of earshot, Hermione and her parents looked on with some concern as they were packing her trunk in the boot of their gray BMW. A moment later, she saw the three Dursleys drive away in the car that had been parked two spots over from their own.

"Hold up a minute, Dad. I'll be right back." She opened the back door and walked back to her friend. "Harry," she asked with genuine concern for her friend. "What's going on?"

Harry replied, "I'm not going back to the Dursleys. They don't want me there and I don't want to be there. I'll rent a room for the summer."

Emma Granger, DDS looked out the window and saw her daughter talking with a poorly dressed teen. They appeared to know each other. She thought that he must be one of the boys from her school. By now the other witches and wizards and their parents had dispersed. She got out of their car and walked over. Smiling at the slightly built teen, she said, "Hi. I'm Emma Granger."

Hermione said, "I'm sorry mum, this is my good friend Harry Potter."

She smiled warmly and said, "Hello. We may have met several years ago. I'm happy to see you again. Are you waiting for someone?"

Harry replied, "No Ma'am. My Aunt and Uncle agreed that we'd all be happier if I didn't stay with them this summer."

Emma looked at him carefully and asked, "What are your plans?"

"I thought that I'd rent a room someplace and stay there." In truth, Harry didn't have any plans.

By now Hermione's father had walked over. Emma pulled him aside for a moment and had a few quick words with him. The bushy haired man smiled and said, "Why not?"

Emma walked back and said, "Harry, if you don't have any other plans, you could rent a room from us. We have an extra room to let out. We would charge you one pound."

"Per night?" asked Harry. He thought that seemed a rather low amount. Tom at the Leakey Cauldron had charged two Galleons a night for a small room when he stayed there for a week before his third year.

"One pound for the summer," she said smiling, thinking with clothing like that, the young man obviously didn't have much money.

Hermione looked at him encouragingly.

"OK," he said, "If you're sure I wouldn't be a bother. I'll gladly help around the house. I'm quite handy. I can cook and clean, do laundry and take care of the garden."

It saddened her to think how he became so adept at housework at such a young age. She replied warmly, "We'll all share the chores. Shall we get going?"

Hermione carefully picked up Hedwig, Harry's pet owl who was watching the scene unfold from her cage.

Hermione's dad came over and reintroduced himself. "Hi. I'm Dan Granger," he said, holding out his hand.

Harry shook it. "Hello sir. I'm Harry. Harry Potter." They met eyes and nodded.

The women walked a bit ahead. Dan asked, "You're friends with my daughter?"

"Yes sir. Since we were eleven. Thank you for letting me stay, sir. I promise I won't be a bother."

"I'm certain that Hermione will enjoy having you at the house. There aren't a lot of other teens in the neighborhood, and she wasn't much for sports in primary school."

After they got to Dan's car they rearranged the trunk space and made room for everything. Harry opened the cage and asked his owl to follow them. Dan and Emma watched with some interest. They had never seen a snowy owl up close, and from any perspective, she was a beautiful bird.

After a pleasant drive to Crawley where the Grangers lived, they reached their home. Larger by half than the Dursley home, it had an attached car park. It was a five bedroom, three level brick home with a spacious kitchen, dining room, family area, and a study on the first floor. In the back garden there was a pool, a small flowerbed, a fire pit, and an open area.

Dan and Emma sent the teens out to the back garden. They put the trunks into the different rooms and prepared the guest bedroom for Harry to use. Dan asked Emma, "What possessed you to take a stranger into our home?"

Emma gave him an impatient look and said, "He's hardly a stranger. I've been reading about Harry Potter since Hermione was eleven. He has been mentioned in practically every letter that she's ever written us. We simply haven't gotten a chance to know him. He's an orphan and there is no apparent nurturing from his Aunt and Uncle if they were willing to turn him loose for the summer. Can't we do something nice for someone for a change?"

Slightly ashamed, he replied, "Yes dear. You're right." It would be nice to get to know another magical person her own age. "Will they be OK together?"

She looked at him patiently and said, "They're OK together ten months of the year. Lets assume the best and keep our eyes open."

Meanwhile Harry and Hermione were walking around the back garden. Hermione asked, "What happened, Harry?"

Harry looked down and said, "They didn't want me there. I didn't want to be there. They didn't take to kindly to being berated by the Order. I didn't want to go to Grimmauld place either. I was planning on renting

a room from Tom at the Leaky Cauldron until your mum offered me a place. Do you think she's really OK with having me stay here? If she's not, I could leave after dinner."

Hermione asked, "Don't you want to stay?" Her light brown eyes met his for a moment, and she looked down at her feet. She was saddened and angered by his words. How could anyone not want him?

Encouraged, Harry said, "I'd be happy to, if you wouldn't mind."

She looked at him and nodded.

All he could say was, "Thanks."

Meanwhile, Tonks and Fletcher were sitting on a conjured bench on the side of the Dursleys yard when the car pulled up. They were hidden from view using the disillusionment charm. Mundungus was watching a rabbit in the back yard, when he felt a hard poke in the side. Tonks whispered, "Where's Harry?"

The old scrounger muttered, "Dunno. Are ya sure you saw em git off the train?"

"Yes. Mooney, Mad-eye, Arthur and I had words with the old tub-a-lard at the station."

She got up and said, "Check their car. She went up to the front door and knocked."

Vernon answered the door. In a very pleasant voice he asked, "May I help..." Then he recognized her. In a much less pleasant tone, he demanded, "What do you want?"

In an equally sarcastic voice Tonks replied, "What do you think? Where's Harry?"

"No idea. We left him at the station."

In a rage, Tonks said, "You effing moron. Were you born stupid, or did you have to work at it? You're a dead man walking."

Vernon would not allow himself to be intimidated by a five foot three inch young woman. He scowled at her and replied, "Don't you threaten me, dearie."

Taking a calming breath, Auror Tonks said, "I'm not threatening you, Mr. Dursley. I'm stating a fact. The magical protection wards that protect this home and its occupants get renewed when Harry stays here. Without them, you and your family are as good as dead. Didn't you read the letter that was sent with him when he was dropped on your pathetic doorstep as an infant? His mother protected him and your family with blood magic. Is there any part of this that isn't clear? You'd better effing find him, not now, but right now." She turned and walked away leaving Vernon's mouth gaping open like a two-day-old mackerel.

She walked around the corner and disillusioned herself again, then called, "Fletcher?"

He said, "There was nothing of his in the car or the boot."

She said, "You wait here. Don't even think of leaving again. I'll go tell Dumbledore." As she was getting ready to leave, she saw a blue crackle around the edge of the yard and heard a soft pop.

Realizing the implications, she ran back to the front door, and pounded on it. Petunia answered, shouting, "Go away, you freak."

Tonks replied, "Petunia Evans Dursley, the protection that your sister Lilly died to leave you and your nephew has ended. I recommend that you leave here immediately."

"Get out," she said, slamming the door. "We don't want you freaks near us."

"Works for me," said Tonks as she turned around. "Come on Dung. Let's go tell Dumbledore."

Five minutes after they left, a dozen Death Eaters apparated onto the property, able to for the first time in fifteen years. Thirty seconds later, number four Privet Drive was a blazing inferno. The dark mark hung in the sky over Little Winging.

Thirty-five miles to the southeast of the burning home, two teens were sitting in the back garden drinking Cokes.

A/N

Did it seem out of character that the Dursleys just drove off?

Chapter 2

Sitting by the Grangers pool, Hermione looked over at Harry with concern. "What is it?"

Harry wasn't sure. His scar twitched and tingled. "Dunno. I had a funny feeling."

"Dinner's ready," said Emma. She smiled at both of them and said, "It's good to have you both here. The house is usually so quiet. What would you like to drink? We have coffee, tea, milk, juice, lemonade, soda, and beer."

Harry replied, "Coffee please. How can I help?"

"Just sit down and enjoy yourself. We can talk about keeping the house up later."

They ate their dinner in comfortable silence. Emma and Dan knew of the attack in the Ministry building only in the most general of terms. They had been notified that their daughter had been injured in a school outing of some sort and had been treated. They wanted to know all of the details but were patient enough to wait.

Harry thanked them for dinner and began clearing the dishes. Hermione had not seen that side of Harry before, scurrying around like a house elf on a mission.

Emma sensed that this was not the first time that the slightly built young man had done the cleanup. He fell into the role of domestic help too easily. Rather than argue with him, she let him do the dishes, but came in a few minutes later to dry and put them away. "You seem rather comfortable in a kitchen, Harry. Do you like to cook and clean?"

Harry thought about it for a moment. He was quite practiced at cleaning and was pretty good at cooking. He smiled at her and said, "I guess that I like to cook and I don't mind cleaning up afterwards. How about you?"

Emma smiled. After a day standing leaning over patients working on their teeth, she was usually exhausted. Putting a positive spin on, she replied, "I like to bake – Breads, cakes, or cookies on Saturday mornings, but on a daily basis, I'd rather not."

Seeing an opportunity to be useful, Harry replied, "How about if I help out by doing the cooking then. Could I do that much at least? I really want to help."

She smiled at him. "Thank you, Harry. That would be lovely. Let me know what you need, and I'll get it for you from the market."

Harry thought, 'This is too much. Petunia never asked my what I'd like to have.' He replied, "I'll gladly make anything that you like. It doesn't matter to me."

While Hermione was visiting with her dad, and Harry and Emma were discussing baking, Tonks and Mundungus had finally found Dumbledore who had been visiting his brother. The old professor took them into his office and examined several of the whirling silver instruments that had repaired themselves after his discussion with Harry just five days ago. He tapped one of them, and it gave a puff. Tonks looked on with more than a bit of concern when it showed a smoky image of a burnt up home with a Dark Mark floating above it.

He put a bit of floo powder into the fireplace, stuck his head in the fire and said, "Amelia Bones, please." A moment later, he came out of the fireplace and said, "Please tell me again what happened from the moment Harry got off the train." She relayed his waving goodbye to a few friends, their conversation with Vernon Dursley and their departure.

While more than a bit alarmed at her words, Dumbledore long ago learned not to shoot the messenger and replied, "Please think carefully, Miss Tonks. Had Harry already left before you and the members of the Order greeted Harry's aunt and uncle?"

"No sir. He was standing off to the side struggling with his trunk and his owl. We left immediately after we talked with him. I did anyway."

Moody had another appointment; Arthur took Ginny and Ron home. I'm not sure what Remus' plans were, sir."

Dumbledore nodded. "What do you think happened to Harry, Miss Tonks?"

"My guess is his uncle said something to set him off, they had words, and they left him there on the platform. It wouldn't be the first time that he's tried to leave them."

Dumbledore nodded. She probably was right. "Please check at the Leakey Cauldron and Gringotts, Miss Tonks. Mundungus, please make a quiet inquiry on the Knight Bus, then call the others for a seven PM meeting."

A few minutes after Tonks and Mundungus had left, Amelia Bones, Director of the office of Magical Law Enforcement came back through his fireplace. He offered her a lemon drop, which she refused. She was a mentally sharp woman in her late sixties who had succeeded in her career despite a lifetime of gender prejudice in the law enforcement field. She was similar in appearance to Minerva, except that she had been blonde in her youth, and had an investigator's eye for detail. She greeted him and asked, "When did Auror Tonks and the scoundrel Fletcher arrive here?"

"About six. What did you find?"

"The house had been magically sealed and incinerated. I believe that at least ten Death Eaters were involved. The house was completely enveloped in flames by the time that we arrived. I would estimate that the fires had been started no longer than five minutes prior. We found the remains of three bodies inside. My belief is that the Death Eaters never set foot inside the home. The Dursleys had summoned the Little Winging fire department by telephone."

Unasked, she volunteered, "The only person out of place that anyone noticed was an unkempt man seen in their back garden that looked like he'd been drinking." She smiled indulgently and asked, "Is it safe to say that would have been Fletcher?"

Dumbledore nodded.

She paused a moment and said. "I have to at least ask, are you certain that it could not have been Harry who set the fires?"

Dumbledore replied, "I wasn't there but I'm confident that it wasn't. Mundungus searched the boot of the vehicle which they saw it arrive. Harry's possessions were not in the car, and I'm certain that he would not have willingly abandoned his owl or his trunk. Additionally Tonks told me that she saw the wards go down. They wouldn't have dropped if he had been there, even if they had been arguing. There must have been some external circumstance."

Amelia was ready to leave when Dumbledore asked her if she would accompany him to a meeting. She knew of the existence of his Order of the Phoenix, and had a reasonable idea of the members. Since he was no longer harboring a wanted man, she agreed to go. She had believed him regarding Sirius Black, but without any physical evidence to the fact, she had no basis to overturn Crouch's decision to imprison Black.

He took her hand, picked up a muggle pen and clicked it. A moment later, they had arrived at the back of number twelve Grimmauld Place. Dumbledore took a slip of parchment out of his vest, and handed it to her, asking her to read it. As she did, a door appeared and they entered.

After dinner, Emma asked the teens if they had any dirty laundry that needed cleaning. Hermione brought down a gigantic pile of clothing. After the first load was in the washer, Emma went up to see if Harry had any laundry.

Hermione was in the shower down the hallway. She found Harry in his room, sitting on the floor sitting with his back to the bed. He was looking at a large leather-bound photo album. Tears had welled in his eyes. She sat down beside him, and gently asked, "Can you show me some of your photos? I'd like to look at them with you."

Unused to kindness by an adult Harry started over in the book. "This was my mum and dad. They were in seventh year at the time and had begun dating. Dad played Quidditch for the house team. Mum was more interested in studying. I think ancient runes and charms were her favorite subjects.

Emma looked carefully at the photo. Harry's dad was probably a few inches taller and weighed twenty pounds more than his son currently did, but they had the same hair and general features. He was well dressed and obviously in love with the girl in the photo. She was several inches shorter than the man, quite pretty, and had beautiful auburn hair that fell past her shoulders. She had the same striking emerald eyes as her son. It was amazing to her to see wizarding photos that moved on the page.

"Emma observed, "She was a very beautiful young woman. You look a lot like your dad. I suppose you've heard that before?"

Harry nodded his head and continued, "Here is a photo of their wedding. I think they were eighteen at the time. That's my dad, and those were his two best mates. He was my Godfather and the other one taught at school for a while."

Emma nodded, but didn't say anything. Hermione'd written that Harry's Godfather had been murdered last week. She realized that the young man sitting next to her was grasping for the pieces of his life and felt his loss.

Comforted by her presence Harry turned the page and continued. "Here is a photo of my folks and Sirius at my birthday party. Sirius was in trouble from my mum. He and my dad had snuck me outside to go flying on my dad's broom."

She was curious who had instilled the background memories into the boy. These were moments that all had a very positive spin on them.

He turned the page and said, "Here is a picture of Hermione, Ron and I from our first year. We sure were little."

It was a photo of the three of them taken during the winter. Harry's owl was perched on Hermione's shoulder and Harry was feeding it something while Ron looked on. Emma smiled as the bird opened its wings and didn't inquire about the ten year gap in the photos.

"Here is a photo from our third year," said Harry.

"Is that Ron's pet?" asked Emma.

Harry nodded. "That was his pet rat, Scabbers. He was OK except it turned out that he was really a bad wizard hiding out in the form of a rat, so no one would find him. He helped murder my mum and dad."

Stunned at his words, she put her arm around him and rocked him for a moment. "You need better photos to look at. Turn the page. Let's look at the others. What is this one?"

Harry replied, "The school had a tournament between a wizarding school in France and a school in Bulgaria. The first challenge was to figure out a way to pick up a golden egg from the clutches of a mother dragon. Hermione taught me a clever charm to summon my broom and I was able to swoop down and grab it before she could catch me."

"Is that a real dragon?" Emma looked at it carefully. Obviously she had never seen a real dragon before. She was amazed. "This one looked remarkably like the movie versions."

"Yup, a Hungarian Horntail. They are the toughest kind. Ron's brother, Charlie is a kind of zookeeper in Romania. He helps raise different kinds of dragons in a big reserve."

Harry had one last picture. It was a photo of Harry and Hermione with the school headmaster and an extremely large man that Emma had not seen.

He said, "This was taken last year. That is Professor Dumbledore and that is Hagrid. He teaches one of the classes, care of magical creatures. He found me when I was eleven and bought me my owl."

“These are very nice, Harry. Thank you for sharing them with me. Did you have any laundry that needed washing? Let’s look.” Before Harry could do or say anything she had opened his trunk. Aside from his school books and equipment, he had a few sets of school robes, the uniform shirt, tie and trousers, an old pair of taped up trainers, several pair of worn stockings, an impossibly big sweatshirt, an equally big pair of jeans, two sweaters which someone had knitted and two tee shirts. She silently closed the trunk. Who are those people that would let their child go around without any proper clothing?

She gave him a quick hug and said, “We’ll have to do some shopping tomorrow. You and Hermione both need some new outfits. Dan bought a new gadget this week to play videos. It’s called a DVD player. When you’re ready come on down. We’ll put one on.”

Dan Granger pictured himself as a techie and was a merchant’s dream as a customer. If there was something new, he tried it out. He switched operating systems on their home computer from the reliable DOS v6.2 to the Windows version 3.12. He finally had made friends with that when he decided that he needed a new computer and the just released Windows 95. The only software that either of the dentists had ever used was a word processor and a spreadsheet program but he had found a replacement for his printer, and told Harry that the latest one was a laser printer.

He had cameras, and a video recorder as well as an amazing collection of miniature tin soldiers that he had painted. “I’m good with my hands,” he said. Harry supposed that it came with the job of being a dentist.

He put on the latest release, Braveheart. Emma thought it far too violent for her taste. She preferred musicals, but they did take turns selecting videos. Later, they popped popcorn and they played hearts. She commented, “You have your choice of a lot more games with a fourth player.”

Harry supposed that she was right. He had no recollection of playing any games as a family at the Dursleys.

Meanwhile at Grimmauld Place, the meeting had not been very productive. In retrospect, having three wizards and a witch intimidate a muggle who just wanted to be left alone didn't seem like such a wonderful idea.

Dumbledore knew that they would be harder on themselves than necessary, so he did nothing to fuel the fire. Getting back to the matter at hand, Harry was missing, and had no place to stay.

Molly immediately offered to take Harry in. The others pointed out that the burrow might not be a safe enough location, and he would be better to stay at Grimmauld Place.

Bones pointed out that since there was no direct evidence that he had been abducted, Harry would not be considered missing until he had been gone for 48 hours. She also pointed out that since his parents had not designated the Dursleys as his guardians, any wishes that Sirius Black had documented should be considered.

Snape asked, "Has anyone thought to send an owl to the insolent brat and ask him where he is?"

Obviously not, since Molly scribbled a message and hurriedly tied it to the owl's leg, before sending it on its way.

She said, "Harry should get his within a half hour if he isn't too far away. We should hear from him within an hour or so." They sat back down and waited.

Ten minutes into the flight, the knot that Molly had used to tie the letter with gave way and the letter fluttered to the ground ending up down a storm sewer. The owl, realizing that it had lost its parcel swooped down to try to retrieve it. Halfway down, it spotted a pair of mice and all thoughts that it may have had of a missing letter vanished. The owl returned to the burrow at six AM.

Harry got up at six, showered and made coffee. He poured a cup and sat in the back garden waiting for the others to get up. He always liked mornings the best. He wasn't anxious to contact the Order and inform them that he had been invited to spend the summer at a home where he was actually welcome. It would come out badly and the only one who wouldn't feel bad was Dumbledore. He didn't want to be forced to go back to the Dursleys for the summer.

He was so angry at the man. 'Why did he abandoned me during the school year? Why hadn't he told me that Riddle would be trying to trick me?' His negligence had cost a good man's life and his friends had suffered serious injuries blindly following him.

Harry decided that it would be a long time before Dumbledore would have anything to say that would be worth hearing. Out of habit, he began weeding the flowerbeds in back. By 7:30 he had finished. A moment later, Emma came out.

Seeing his hands, she said, "I like to come out and work in the flower beds too. I sleep in a bit later than you do though. Thanks for the coffee. The roses are doing well this year."

Having taken five years of herbology, Harry replied, "The rains have been good this year, and you have excellent soil for them. There is a good amount of drainage and you have them mulched well. It only took a few minutes to tidy up the beds a bit. You obviously take great care of them."

She looked at him with increased respect. "Thanks Harry. I do like tending them. I never had the opportunity for formal study of plants like you've received, but I have fun muddling along."

"I'll pick you up some dragon dung fertilizer sometime. You would be amazed how well they will do."

Emma realized that there was an entire world that had been hidden from her eyes, and was glad that her daughter could experience it. Harry seemed so down to earth and attuned to nature.

“Come on in, Harry. We’ll fix breakfast and go out and do a bit of shopping. After breakfast, Dan will put the trunks away. There is an empty shelf in the library for your books. We’ll get you some new things to wear, and you’ll be all set to enjoy your holiday.”

At breakfast, Hermione asked if she could borrow Hedwig to send Professor Vector a note about an Arithmancy project that she had been working on. She lived in Cork, so it might be a while, but Hedwig would like the exercise and Harry didn’t need to check in for two more days. Dan suggested that Harry put Hedwig’s cage in the library as there was a very good spot for it and a window that would be easy to open and close as they needed.

After breakfast, Hermione picked up the house a bit, Harry and Emma put the dishes away and Dan put the trunks down in the cellar.

They got in the car, and left for the day. Emma asked, “Harry, would you prefer shopping at Harvey Nichols, or Selfridges? They both have nice things. Hermione, any preference?”

Sitting next to each other in the back, Harry whispered something to Hermione. “Either would be fine. Dad, would it be OK if we stopped in Diagon Alley for a few minutes first. Harry needs to stop at his bank and I’d like to pick up a book.”

‘Imagine that,’ thought Dan. “No worries, we’ll be there in a half hour.” They parked the car and walked a block to the entrance.

“How long do you need?” asked Emma.

Harry replied, “Not long. Twenty minutes total if you know which book you need.” Hermione nodded.

Dan said, “There are some DVDs that I’d like to look at in the shop next door. We can meet back in the car in a half hour.”

Emma said, “Lovely.” Looking at Harry, she asked, “Do you mind if I tag along?”

Hermione and Harry didn’t mind and they parted ways.

It was fairly crowded in the Leakey Cauldron that morning. Tom had to go into the cellar to change out one of the 32 gallon kegs of butterbeer. His assistant Nob, was worthless, but the ancient squib was at least a decent short order cook. Tom told him to keep an eye on the place for a few minutes while he was downstairs.

Hermione opened the door and they went in, made their way down the pub and passed through the back door to the bricked alley. Touching her wand to the bricks, the doorway to Diagon Alley opened and they passed through. A minute later Tom returned, and asked, "Anybody pass through, Nob?"

"Aye, a couple o birds. Lookers too."

Tom, shook his head. G' back to work, ya o perv. We got a crowd that's wanting to be fed." One of the Ministry Aurors had stopped by yesterday and asked him to let her know if he saw Harry Potter in the next few days.

They walked to Gringotts first. Harry had worn a Quidditch team hat had Neville had gotten him, and looked like any other young wizard on holiday. They passed the uniformed guard at the bronze front entrance of Gringotts. Harry walked up to the accounts counter with his key in hand. Hermione and Emma stood by him with some interest. They didn't have an account there and had only been to the exchange window before. Harry showed the Goblin his key and asked "Could Griphook, take us to my vault please. I'd like to make a withdrawal and exchange some galleons into sterling notes when I get back."

The head teller liked at the key carefully, then looked at Harry and said, "That would be acceptable. We are happy to serve you today, Harry Potter."

Emma wasn't certain that the young man wanted them to be so intimate with his financial affairs and offered to wait in the lobby. Harry smiled at her and said, "Come on, this is nothing like Barclays. You'll love it."

The four of them crowded into one of the little trolley carts. Griphook asked, "Which vault, Mr. Potter?"

Harry said, "Number 678."

Griphook nodded and the little cart started. Emma thought it was the best roller coaster ride that she had ever been on. It seemed to go for miles! Griphook got out first and asked for the key. Harry handed it to him, and the little Goblin carefully opened the vault door. Emma hung back, not wanting to embarrass the young man with his unfortunate situation. Hermione was speechless. She had been to the Weasley vault once with Molly, but it was nothing like this. The vault was the size of a walk in closet, filled with gold Galleons, each about the size of a pound coin. She glanced to the side while Harry was scooping some into an ice cream bucket sized container. The ledger sheet indicated that there were two hundred seventy-eight thousand galleons and about an equal number of silver sickles in the vault!

As he scooped them into the container, she noticed that the ledger sheet reflected the change. When he was done, she gave it one last look, for a moment it was about two thousand galleons less, then it changed nearly back to the original amount with a note that said Interest applied – May-June. Harry held the bucket with both hands and Griphook closed the door. Emma had been looking up and down the dimly lit corridors and hadn't really been paying attention. When they got back to the cart, Emma asked about the flash of light that she had seen down the corridor.

Griphook replied, "Dragons guard the high security vaults. Perhaps you'll visit another day and see one."

They went back up nearly as fast as the rode down. Emma and Hermione waited at one of the benches while Harry exchanged most of the galleons for sterling notes.

Meanwhile Kingsley had been asked to check at the Granger house in the odd chance that Harry may have found his way there. He got to the house and found it locked. He used magic to open the door and stepped inside. Taking a quick look upstairs, there was no sign that the Potter boy had been there. The spare bedroom was empty, and

the laundry either looked muggle, or like a teenage girl's. He carefully closed the door and relocked it.

Dumbledore had mentioned that the Granger girl's parents were muggle dentists and that they usually took a trip during the holiday. They probably were getting ready to go, or had already left.

Harry found Hermione and her mum at the Gringotts lobby bench and they left the bank to go the Flourish and Blotts. Hermione found four books on Arithmancy and runes that she wanted, while Harry found three books on dueling and home security. Emma didn't have enough galleons with her and the shopkeeper didn't take sterling, so Harry offered to pay for the books. They could settle up another day.

They made their way back down the street back to the pub. Just as they were walking in, Nob accidentally tipped over one of the big serving trays down by the wait station. Tom went over to help clean up the mess, muttering about the worthless old buzzard that he'd worked with for forty years.

They walked out the front door unnoticed and found Dan who was just finishing his shopping in the record store. He walked out commenting that they still sold LPs there in addition to CDs and the new DVDs.

At Harvey Nichols, Harry was well taken care of. Hermione and Emma had exceptional taste in clothing. They found some oxford shirts, casual shirts, nice trousers, casual trousers, jeans, stockings, boxers and three pair of shoes for him. Hermione found a swimsuit, an exercise outfit, and running shorts for both of them, as well as several pair of jeans, slacks and several skinny tops for herself.

Emma insisted on paying for their new things over Harry's protests. Aunt Petunia had never offered to take him shopping for new clothing. Harry was embarrassed at the attention that he was getting. In truth, he had very low self-esteem, and couldn't see how anyone would believe him to be deserving of so many nice things.

While they were out shopping, Professor Vector received the owl from her favorite student.

Dear Professor Vector,

Thanks for the suggestion on the holiday reading. I hope to get a chance to pick them up today. I hope that you have the best holiday. I expect to have a great one myself.

Thanks for all of your extra help this last year. I'll show you my work when term begins. You are an outstanding professor.

Thanks again,

Hermione Granger

Vector read the note with pride, wrote a quick reply and sent the owl back on her way. Not having Harry in her classes, she had no way of knowing who the owl belonged to. She had a month off before the start of term planning meetings began.

The Grangers returned home about noon. Dan and Emma sat out in the back garden while the teens put their things away. The dentists both had afternoon appointments at their surgery and told the teens that they'd be back at 4:30. Harry replied he'd have dinner ready at 5:00.

On the way to their practice, Dan asked Emma about their shopping.

Emma said, "Harry invited Hermione and I to go down to the vaults with him at Gringotts. He showed them his vault key, a goblin put us in a little ore cart, and we went miles underground on this winding little track. It was the best time. While Harry was getting his coins, I think I saw a dragon breath fire."

Amused, Dan replied, "Sure."

"No, really. He showed me his photo album. I saw a picture of him with this gigantic dragon that they had used in some school event two years ago."

Dan looked at her, shocked at her words. "That skinny kid battled a dragon?"

She smiled at her husband. "Yup. He beat hit too."

Dan was amazed. "Really? I'll have to ask him about it sometime. How did you manage to get Hermione out of the bookshop?"

They smirked at each other, knowing their daughter's love of books. She said, "Hopefully they won't spend all summer studying ancient runes or Arithmancy. They could swim, or play tennis, or go to the mall."

Dan nodded. "Do you still want to go to Cannes or Marseilles in August?"

"It would be nice. It would be nice to stay around the house and putter in the garden too. Let's decide in a few days."

Back at the burrow, Ron and Ginny were in the back paddock flying on their broomsticks with Luna who lived a few miles away from them. Luna asked, "How did Harry take the news?"

Ginny asked, "What news?"

Luna said, "His aunt and uncles home was attacked yesterday. Wasn't it in the Daily Prophet? Daddy showed me. I read it this morning in the Times."

The two Weasleys were stunned by the news. Their parents hadn't said a word about it.

According to the wizarding world, Harry had been missing for 27 hours.

A/Ns

Please review.

Given the circumstances, who would be Harry's legal guardian?
Would that hold true in the wizarding world?

How much could Dumbledore get away with?

Who could Harry object to?

Chapter 3

Amelia Bones began to review all of the relevant documents that she could find. In the wizarding world, a parent needed to list the lines of succession in specifying guardianship for minor children. In Harry's case that aspect was clearly stated. In the muggle world, an orphaned child with no resources would become a ward of the state. Fortunately Harry had no lack of resources at his disposal.

Harry had been placed in the care of his mother's sister against the specific documented wishes of James and Lilly Potter. They had wished him to be placed in the care of Sirius Black. There was no evidence of any wrongdoing on Black's part at the point in time when Hagrid took baby Harry from the home, and he was given to the Dursleys.

Black was the designated legal guardian, and had never been convicted of a crime. Black's Will, dated 7 May of this year specifically requested that the court emancipate Harry and allow him to take care of himself in the event of Black's death. Even without any resources that might eventually become available from the as yet unresolved Black estate, Harry had sufficient resources to live many years on his own.

The Dursley Will stated that their assets should be given to a sister of Mr. Dursley, and also specifically stated that Harry should be emancipated to fend for himself. Their intent may have been less benevolent to Harry's well being, but it was a legally registered document.

She knew that Dumbledore had an unusually strong interest in young Mr. Potter. There must be more behind it than being an orphaned child of old friends. There were scores of orphaned witches and wizards in Britain who had lost parents to Voldemort. No other Hogwarts student was subjected to a 24-hour guard. As far as that goes, she was considering disciplinary action against the four who threatened Vernon Dursley and most likely started this mess. Potter probably wished for nothing greater than to have a normal summer.

Bones decided to intervene as a friend of the court on his behalf when Potter eventually turned up. At a minimum, she was sure that either Dumbledore or Fudge would try to influence the placement decision. She hoped that wherever he was now, he was safe, healthy, and happy.

“Harry you need to hold your breath when you are underwater. There’s no Gillyweed in the pool.” Harry was gasping and sputtering, having gulped down what seemed like half of the Granger’s backyard swimming pool.

After a minute, he had regained his breath, and believed that he would live. She tried again. “Take a breath and hold it in. If you have enough air in you, you’ll float. I’ll hold you. Now float on your back. OK, now tilt your head back a bit. Breathe a bit, but keep some air in you.” She lowered her hands from his back where she had been holding him. He remained buoyant. “There. You can float properly. Now kick a little bit with your feet and motor around the pool a bit. I’ll make sure you don’t sink. Good. Breathe. Good. You can do it.”

For a few minutes, Harry did swim around the pool. “It’s harder than it looks,” he commented.

“Your body density is such that you barely have any natural flotation.”

“Huh?”

“Harry, you don’t have any body fat, so you need to keep paddling, or you’ll sink like a rock. How on earth did you manage to swim all around that huge lake and rescue everyone?”

Harry shrugged his shoulders and replied, “Magic. It’s nearly time to start making dinner. Your folks will be home soon. Thanks for the lesson, and thanks for taking me in for the summer. I really appreciate it.”

She smiled at him, and looked at him for a moment before replying, “That’s what friends are for.”

Harry looked at her and smiled back. She had on a high necked white one piece swimsuit. It wasn't the one that she'd bought earlier in the day. Harry wondered if her wound had healed properly.

She followed his eyes and smiled to herself. "If you're staring at my bits, yes they're mine. If you're wondering about the scar, it's almost gone. I have potions to take for three more days, and thank you for being concerned." She kissed his cheek.

Harry looked down. She knew that he felt guilty for everything that happened that night. When he was ready, she would talk about it with him. In reality, she bore him no blame. Everyone who went there that night went of their own free will.

"Come on. Show me that you can make something really good for dinner. What's your favorite?"

"Pizza. We never get it at school."

Hermione was impressed. Her idea of homemade pizza was frozen. "Do you really know how to make it?"

"Yup. Let's see if your mum has the different stuff. Do you like pepperoni, or veggie, or sausage, or green olive or...?"

"Green olive actually, but I know that's not to everyone's taste. How about half and half? Dad likes pepperoni, Mum will be happy with anything that she doesn't have to make. I'll find the sauce if you make the dough. Can you slice the pepperoni and olives?"

Harry laughed. "After five years with Snape? A few olives should be easy."

As Amelia was finishing with her paperwork, Dumbledore stopped by. Dispensing with the usual pleasantries, he asked, "Have you had any updates regarding Harry?"

Ignoring his question, she said, "I spent the last several hours reviewing the original paperwork, the original Wills and the original child placement paperwork. It appears like you completely ignored James and Lilly's express wishes and did whatever you felt like."

Dumbledore said nothing. Obviously he had his reasons, but only he and Harry knew the full contents of the prophecy.

Bones persisted. She would not get ignored like one of his school children asking a ridiculous question. "Do you have any reasonable explanation?"

"None that I care to discuss. There were good reasons for my actions."

She persisted. "I can't think of any that would suffice." Dumbledore didn't reply.

Her only conclusion was that they were holding separate conversations. How rude. "When he is found, what do you expect to happen?"

"He will be placed in my care, of course."

Amelia was mad at the man. "Dumbledore, I will be as plain as I can be. That will not happen unless Harry James Potter specifically agrees, and I seriously doubt that he would do so. You will not kidnap him. You will not place him in the care of anyone who he does not want to live with." Dumbledore said nothing.

She was still gathering steam. "All of the paperwork indicates that if he has the means, he is to be emancipated. His current assets would certainly cover his expected expenses for the next fifty years, even if his inheritance from Sirius gets swindled away from him, and I have no intention of letting that happen either."

Dumbledore said patiently, "Amelia, you are not the judge in this case." 'She would get this way when she was a student too'.

The anger was rising in her. “And you are not the investigator. What were you thinking of having one of my Senior Aurors break into an innocent family’s home. I should have his shield for being talked into that, and your Justiceship for telling him to do it.”

Nonplussed, Dumbledore relied on his old standby excuse. “Harry needs protection.”

“You – need - to – stop! You have no jurisdiction in this case. You went against the wishes of his parents and placed him in a horrible setting for eleven years. You cannot go against the consistent documented wishes of both his Godfather and his legal guardians, which you personally selected. Go find him if you wish. Do not use my people to do so. Do not take him from wherever he is, unless he is in clear and eminent danger. By that I mean he is currently being attacked by an overwhelming force, or he is specifically endangering himself. Do not force any of your solutions on him. Have I made myself clear?”

“As always. It is important that he be kept away from Voldemort. He is certainly being targeted.”

Amelia looked really exasperated with the old wizard. “If we keep this up, his disappearance and whereabouts will become public knowledge and that will effectively force the issue, wouldn’t it?”

He hated it when well-meaning people interfered with his plans. “Good day, Director.”

“Professor.”

On the drive back from their surgery, Emma was glancing through The Times, and cried, “Oh no.”

Dan asked, “What’s the matter, Em?”

Emma, sighed and said, "Harry's aunt and uncle, Vernon and Petunia Dursley along with their son were killed yesterday evening in a house fire at their home."

"How did it happen?"

"The paper didn't mention much other than to say that the cause was under investigation and that neighbors had recently seen a suspicious old man in the back garden who had been drinking."

"The kid doesn't catch many breaks does he?"

"He obviously thinks the world of Hermione."

"Well that makes him an unlucky kid who has good taste."

Emma smiled a bit at her best friend. "So you don't hate him anymore?"

"Em, I'm the dad of a teenage daughter. It's my job to hate any teenage boy who comes by."

"He didn't come by. We invited him into our home. I know that you like him." She gave his arm a squeeze. "Dan, your job is to support Hermione's decisions."

In truth, Dan really did like Harry. However it was against the code of protective dad-ship to ever admit anything of the sort. "He's OK. What happens to him now?"

Emma didn't know, but decided to get interested very quickly. "He mentioned a department of magical law enforcement. We can talk with Harry. Let's have dinner first. I'm curious to see what they made for us."

"Me too. If it's good, maybe we can keep him."

"Dan..."

"I'm sorry. Even if he made a crappy dinner, we can offer him a place to stay. He's certainly no bother."

She smiled at the man that she loved so much. "Why don't you just admit that you like him, and be done with it?"

"Fine. I like the kid too."

"Thanks. I love you too."

Ginny and Ron had rehearsed their discussion. After everyone was seated for dinner, Ron asked, "Where's Harry?"

Molly and Arthur didn't want to worry Ron or Ginny. Molly casually said, "I'm sure he's fine dears. Has he written?"

Exasperated, Ginny said, "Mum, we know that the Dursleys were murdered yesterday. Did you think you could keep that from us? This isn't just Order Business. He's our friend."

Arthur knew they were right. He admitted, "The truth of the matter is he never arrived at the Dursleys. It appears that they left him at the train station in London."

Ginny who hadn't seen the scene that her dad and the others had made asked, "Why would they come for him only to leave him there?"

Embarrassed, but willing to own up to his actions, Arthur replied, "Some of us had a few words with Harry's uncle at the station, and we may have set him off."

Ron said nothing, but the little fireball would not be silenced. "So you all went up and bullied an angry, small-minded man and just walked away when you were done? Then taking the plumb's shite rolls downhill viewpoint, Dursley laid into Harry, and they drove off, leaving him all alone?" There were tears in her eyes. He wasn't her boyfriend, but she cared a lot about him. "Great plan, Dad. Did Moody scare him with that nasty eye of his too?"

Molly was going to step in. Ginny had no right to talk with her father that way, but Arthur cut her off. "Unfortunately yes. It seemed a rather good idea at the time. It just sort of backfired. I'm sorry."

Ron had been quiet long enough. "So what is anyone doing about it? If this is an Order problem, why aren't you two out looking for him?"

Crack. Molly had slapped one of her own children for the first time that she could remember. "Don't ever talk to your father that way. Go to your..."

Arthur stopped her. "Wait Molly. Tempers just got a bit too high."

Red faced, Ron said, "There are only a few places that he'd go – here, the castle, Hagrid's, the Leakey Cauldron, Hogsmeade, or the Shrieking Shack."

Ginny said, "He'd be at Hermione's."

Arthur said, "Kingsley already looked there."

Ginny said, "Look again. Maybe he doesn't want to be found." A second later she asked, "If the Dursleys are dead, where would he have to go live?"

Ron asked, "Why would he go to Hermione's. Why wouldn't he come here? Why wouldn't he want to be found?"

Ginny shook her head. "And you fancy yourself a master of strategy? Cor, Ron, you're thick."

"Ginny," admonished Molly warningly. However, she wanted to hear her reply too.

"Maybe he wants to be away from the wizarding world for a while. His Godfather got murdered right in front of his eyes a week ago. He got in a fight with Bellatrix and Riddle, and Professor Dumbledore's solution would be to dump him back in Sirius' house. Maybe people should just leave him alone for a few weeks. It's not like he's broke."

“What do you mean?” asked Ron.

‘Do I have a brick for a brother?’ thought Ginny. “He’s loaded. Haven’t you ever been to Harry’s vault?”

Ron shook his head. Thinking about the way that Harry dressed, Ron hadn’t really thought too much about Harry having a lot of money.

“Ron. You claim to be one of his best friends. Don’t you two ever really talk? He was abused and mistreated there all of his life.”

“Dunno. We talk about quidditch. How do you know about Harry being mistreated?”

She rolled her eyes in disgust and replied, “Ron, you talk about quidditch. Everyone else just nods their head from time to time to appease you. This isn’t getting us anywhere. Dad, you should go visit the Grangers after dinner, and ask if they have seen him, or know where he might be. Mum, you should go visit Hagrid’s and Madam Rosmerta.”

They nodded, having no better plan themselves. Ginny said, “Just one last thing...”

Molly asked, “What is it, dear?”

“If you find him, don’t tell anyone. I don’t think he wants to be found right now.”

Hermione and Harry had just put the two pizzas that they had created into the oven when Dan and Emma got home. Emma but down her bag and hugged the two teens. Hermione handed her mum a glass of wine. She felt like a queen.

She sat on one of the comfortable kitchen table chairs, took a sip and asked, “How was your afternoon?”

Harry said, "Fun. Hermione tried to teach me how to swim. I think I ended up swallowing half of the pool water in the process, but it turned out all right. I can float on my back now."

She smiled to herself. She was worried that they would have spent the entire afternoon reading. Dan came in. "Smells good. What is it?"

Hermione beamed at her dad and proudly said, "Harry and I made pizza."

Dan nodded and said, "Excellent. What flavor?" The truth of the matter was Hermione's cooking skills needed a bit of work.

"Half sausage, half pepperoni, half green olive, and half cheese. They will be ready in three minutes. You can sit down, and we'll serve."

Impressed, Dan replied, "Thanks. I'll get the glasses. Soda or beer?"

Hermione knew the question was directed at Harry, but answered for him, "Either is fine. Pick out whatever is there." She was a bit surprised that her dad had offered either of them beers.

Dan poured her a half pint, and Harry a pint of Fosters. Harry took the pies out of the oven, let them cool a minute, then sliced and served them.

Emma said, "Hermione and Harry, these look great. Thank you both very much."

They both smiled appreciatively. Hermione's other dinner creations were usually met with a polite response and Harry had never been thanked for making a meal, ever.

They sat in comfortable silence, eating for a few minutes. Hermione sensed that her parents had something unpleasant to say. She hoped that they hadn't changed their minds about allowing Harry to stay. Her other summers had been so lonely. She broke the ice. "What's up?"

Emma began, "Harry, The Times reported that your uncle's home was destroyed in a fire last evening. Apparently everyone was killed."

Hermione hugged her friend, "Oh Harry, I'm so sorry."

Harry didn't know what to think. He asked, "What time?"

Dan said, "The paper said the call to the fire department was about 6:30."

Hermione asked, "If their house was on fire, why didn't they just...?" She had answered her own question. The Dursleys home had intentionally been set on fire and sealed, so no one could get out.

She looked at Harry, who had arrived at the same conclusion. Her unasked question was whether he or the Dursleys had been the target.

Seeing their dark looks Emma said, "The Times article said that one of the neighbors reported seeing a disheveled looking man who apparently had been drinking in the back garden."

"Mundungus," said Harry and Hermione together, knowing that line of reasoning didn't make much sense. They both knew that he was one of the Order guards.

Just then, there was a knock on the front door. Dan went to get it. Instinctively, Harry pulled his wand from his sleeve.

It was Arthur Weasley. He said, "Hello. I'm Arthur Weasley. My son..."

Hermione heard him and said, "Come in Mr. Weasley. Dad, Mum, this is Mr. Weasley, Ginny and Ron's dad. You met a few years ago in Diagon Alley."

Emma said, "Nice to see you again Arthur. I'm Emma, and this is my husband Dan."

Harry stepped around the corner. "Hello, Mr. Weasley."

Arthur's eyes lit up. "Hello Harry. I'm glad to see you. We were worried about you."

Harry didn't want to see the man embarrass himself. He said, "We heard about the fire."

Arthur was surprised that he would have heard. "Yes, I'm sorry too."

Hermione asked, "Mr. Weasley, what happened?"

Arthur wasn't sure how much to say. He answered, "It appears that it was intentionally set."

Harry asked, "Who knows that I'm here?"

Arthur said, "No one. The house was searched this morning, and..."

Emma said, "What do you mean, our house was searched?" There was no smile on her face.

He'd really stuck his foot in the muck this time. He tried to recover saying, "I think Harry was classified as a missing person and some people were simply looking for him."

Dan replied, "That isn't what you said. Wizards or not, you people have no right to search our home. Harry was invited to spend the summer holiday with us, and I intend to see that he stays and my family has a nice holiday."

Harry asked, "What needs to happen? I specifically don't want to go spend the summer at Grimmauld Place, and if the Grangers will have me, I'd like to stay here if I'm welcome."

"Emma said, "Of course you are. You're welcome to stay as long as you wish, Harry."

Harry spoke. "Mr. Weasley, you know where I am and how to reach me. I'd appreciate it if you'd leave it that way, and not say anything to anyone. I really don't want to see the professor right now. We didn't

end the year on the best of terms, and right now, I'm not really interested in hearing what he has to say. Apparently his wards aren't all that great."

Arthur knew that he had no say in the matter, and that Harry was safe. Rather than get into a pointless confrontation he replied, "If you ever need another place to stay, you're always welcome in my home. I'll be going now. Good night everyone."

"Cheers," said Dan, not believing half of what the man had said.

After Mr. Weasley left, Emma asked, "Why would they be looking for you, Harry?"

Harry said, "The professor likes to keep me on a short leash. He usually has me under 24-hour watch, or at least he did last summer. I told Moody that I'd check in every three days. It's only been a day and a half."

There was another knock on the door. Dan went to answer it. Amelia Bones was at the door.

"Dr. Dan Granger? I'm Amelia Bones. May I come in for a moment?" She handed him her identification card.

Harry knew Director Bones. She had been at his dementor trial last summer, and she had been one of the few who took the time to hear him out. He came around the corner and said, "Hello Director Bones."

She looked at him, looked around the nice home for a moment and said, "Hello Mr. Potter. Normally I'd be happy to see you, but I have unpleasant news for you."

Hermione said, "We already know about the Dursleys."

She nodded, and asked, "First of all, are you all right?"

"I'm fine," said Harry. He wasn't fine and things weren't getting any better, but he didn't think that she wanted to hear about his personal problems.

Dan asked, "Excuse me for asking, Amelia, but why are you here?"

"Primarily I came to check on Mr. Potter's safety. He had been reported missing yesterday. Second, I came to notify him of his relatives' deaths and third, to see if his current living arrangements were acceptable both to yourselves and with Mr. Potter."

Harry replied, "I don't know who reported me missing, but I'm fine. The Grangers offered to take me in for the summer after my uncle told me that he didn't want me in his house anymore and drove off. I'm happy here." Bones didn't ask about the specifics of the conversation at the train station, and he didn't offer the exact details.

Emma added, "Harry is welcome to stay with us as long as he wishes to. We'll take good care of him, like we do with our daughter."

Bones nodded and smiled at the woman's obvious sincerity. She took a parchment out of her pocket and filled out a small form. Handing them each a copy, she said, "Here is a conditional use of magic license for the two of you, good until you're seventeen. Please keep your wands with you at all times, and exercise good judgment." They both nodded solemnly. She smiled at them and said, "Here is a wand tap activated portkey. It will take you and anyone holding it to a safe place in the Ministry building. Please keep it with you at all times." They nodded again. She said, "Very good. Does anyone else know that you're here?"

Harry said, "Arthur Weasley was here. He left five minutes before you arrived."

Dan said, "Arthur Weasley implied that someone known to him came into my home this morning and searched it. Do you know anything about that?"

She replied, "Unfortunately I do. One of my Senior Aurors performed an unauthorized, illegal search this morning and will face disciplinary action, I assure you."

She pulled a cellular telephone out of her pocket, and handed it to Harry. "If anyone tries to talk you into leaving here, please push 321. That is my direct line to my other phone." She turned to Dan and Emma and said, "Thank you for your kindness and generosity Dr. and Dr. Granger. Miss Granger, it was nice meeting you too. Enjoy your evening." A moment later, she vanished.

"How about another beer?" asked Dan. He handed Emma the wine bottle, opened another oil can of Fosters for Harry and Hermione and another for himself. Hermione filled their glasses and set the quart size can down.

Sounding all too excited, she said, "Harry, this means that we can practice magic this summer. We can get so ahead on our studies. We should try..."

'Shite,' thought Emma. "It sounds like Harry could use some more practice with his swimming lessons, dear. Don't forget to have some fun this summer. You won't have many more summers off in your life. It's best to take advantage of your holidays while you can."

There was another knock on the door. "Maybe we should have gone out for dinner," quipped Dan.

It was Professor McGonagall and Tonks. "Come in," said Dan, wearily. There was no smile on his face.

"Good evening, Dr. Granger, Dr. Granger, Miss Granger. Is Mr....?"

Again Harry appeared from around the corner. "Good evening Professor, Auror Tonks. How can I help you?"

McGonagall said, "We have come to take you to..."

"No," Harry said simply, but firmly. "I have no intention of going there." He pressed the keys on the cell phone.

"Harry," said Tonks, "You have to."

“Not according to Director Bones,” said Hermione. “She was here a minute ago, and specifically told Harry not to go anywhere, and told him to call her if anyone tried to take him...”

At that moment, Bones arrived, and was furious at what she saw. “Auror Tonks, you are relieved of duty until further notice. Professor, do you have school business here?”

“Not really,” admitted Minerva sheepishly.

“Good. Then enjoy your evening, and please tell Professor Dumbledore to leave these good people alone. Anyone else arriving on these premises from the Order will be arrested, as will Kingsley when I find him.”

Minerva replied, “But Professor Dumbledore...”

Amelia was amazed at the effort that the old wizard went to interfere in Harry’s life. “Professor Dumbledore has no jurisdiction in this young man’s welfare outside of school. Please leave now while you still have the opportunity to. Have I made myself clear?”

Minerva backed down. “Yes Director. Mr. Potter, Miss Granger.”

“Good night, Professor,” said Hermione.

“Go home, Auror Tonks. That’s a direct order.”

“Yes, Director.”

After the two Order members left, Amelia said, “As you have surmised Dr. Granger, there are a number of people that have strong opinions as how to best take care of Harry’s ongoing welfare. Harry, you may be aware that Professor Dumbledore went against your parent’s wishes in initially placing you in your aunt’s custody. The legality of that could easily be challenged, but at this point, it’s water under the bridge. Both your Godfather Sirius Black, as well as you Uncle Vernon Dursley left specific instructions asking that you were to be legally emancipated upon their death. Mr. Black went as far as drafting the paperwork.”

“What can we do to help?” asked Emma.

“If you would be willing, please continue to provide a normal home for Harry for the summer, it would be most appreciated. With your permission, I will be placing three Senior Aurors here, each on a rotating 12-hour shift. If you would allow them to occasionally use one of your loos that would be very helpful. They will be stationed outside in an inconspicuous place on the side of your home. They will not interfere with your personal lives, I assure you. At your discretion, you could elect to have the person on duty accompany you if you go somewhere or you can choose not to.”

She continued, “That should eliminate any safety concerns that the professor might have without interfering with your happy lives. Would that be acceptable to all of you?”

Dan looked at Harry and nodded. Harry said, “Director Bones, your offer is appreciated as long as it doesn’t involve any Auror who is a member of the Order.”

Bones smiled at him. He really was a nice teenager. She hoped that her Susan would meet someone like him. The kid was developing the mental resolve to stand up for himself when he needed to. “That would include Aurors Tonks, Jones, Senior Auror Shacklebolt, and retired Master Auror Moody. Correct?”

Harry nodded.

“Senior Auror Jamie Church will arrive at 9 PM. I will accompany her and introduce you. In the morning, I will return with Senior Auror Connie Hammer. They are both outstanding in their field. Later in the week, I will bring Senior Auror Michael Wood. If that is acceptable, I will return in one hour.”

Both teens nodded. Dan and Emma also nodded. Amelia asked to see each of their wands. She took her own out and softly said an incantation, resulting in both wands glowing blue for two or three seconds then returning to normal. She said, “I removed the spell

tracking charms. Now Malfalda Hopkirk won't send any inappropriate reports about wand use from either of you."

Getting ready to leave, she asked, "Do any of you have any questions?"

Dan asked, "I know of the wizarding civil war that is going on, but is all of this really necessary?"

Amelia replied, "I certainly hope not Dr. Granger. Mr. Potter is a very well known wizard within our world, and we do want to keep both him and your daughter as safe as possible. Your daughter and Mr. Potter were largely responsible for the capture of eleven dangerous witches and wizards a week ago. In turn, they as well as yourselves deserve all of the protection that the wizarding world can provide. Did that answer your question?"

Dan nodded. In fact, her explanation raised more questions than it answered, but they could wait.

She replied, "Good. I will return in an hour with Senior Auror Church." Again, she disappeared before their eyes.

"Interesting," said Emma.

"It was," said Dan. "What was it called, that she just did?"

Hermione said, "Apparation. It is the mental projection of one's body to another location. I've read several books in the subject."

Harry glanced at a smiling Emma for a moment and said, "It's the method that most adult witches and wizards use to travel. You have to test for it when you get your magical license. Rather like a drivers permit, I suppose."

Not surprisingly, there was yet another knock on the door.

A/N

Thank you for all of the good ideas and encouraging feedback. If anyone has an opinion regarding likely co-operation channels that Bones might use with the muggle courts, please either review or e-mail me. (Disputed custody case) If anyone has a good idea on inheritance disputes, or has read a story that handled it well, please advise.

Thanks again.

O-C

Chapter 4

It was Dumbledore and Kingsley.

Dumbledore made a move to come in, but in a surprisingly resolute voice, Dan said, "Headmaster Dumbledore, you're not welcome in my home at this time. I'm asking you politely to leave."

Undaunted, Dumbledore replied, "I have come to move Harry to a safer location. He is not sufficiently protected here."

Dan stood his ground saying, "He does not wish to leave. Sir, I'll ask you politely once again to leave."

Dumbledore did not make a move to leave. Harry had the cell phone out to call Director Bones.

Harry came around the corner with Hermione and Emma. He said, "Professor, I've been invited to spend the summer here, and I've accepted the invitation. Dr. Granger does not appreciate that fact that you ordered his home to be searched illegally. The home is under the protection of several Senior Aurors on loan from Director Bones. Dr. Granger has asked you politely to leave twice. I'll see you on the first of September."

Patronizing him, Dumbledore replied, "Harry, I cannot allow that."

Harry pushed the talk button on the cell phone.

Hermione said, "Professor, my father asked you twice to leave. Please honor his wishes sir."

"Miss Granger, you simply do not understand the situation."

"Sir, I understand that the wards protecting Harry's Aunt's house fell and the Order people who were watching the home at the time decided to leave. After they left, Death Eaters performed a Colloportus spell to seal the windows and doors while other Death Eaters ignited the outside of their home. I understand that the Dursleys were inside and were burned alive. I understand that the

members of your Order tried to intimidate Mr. Dursley at the train station and he took it badly.” There was no twinkle in his eye.

She continued, “Professor, I understand that Harry and I as well as my parents have been targeted by Voldemort’s Death Eaters. I understand that if the wards that were at Harry’s Aunt’s home were due to a blood relationship, they cannot be replaced, and that said, one home would be as good as the next. Professor, with all due respect what part don’t I understand?”

He smiled at her to put her at ease. “It doesn’t matter, Miss Granger. What does matter is that we leave as soon as....”

Pop, Pop, pop, pop, pop, pop. It was Director Bones and five Aurors. She was not a happy person. “Senior Auror Shackbolt, you are under arrest. Professor, have the Grangers asked you to leave?”

Undaunted, Dumbledore said, “In total, four times so far.”

“Professor, are you willing to comply with their wishes?”

“It appears that you have left me with few other choices.”

“Professor, here is the signed paperwork. You and any other members of your Order are specifically prohibited in contacting either the Grangers or Mr. Potter until one September unless it is for the express business of a normal school contact, such as sending book lists and the like via owl. They have made their wishes known. You will not be participating in any future custody hearings as you have been shown to have a serious conflict of interest in the matter. Do you have any questions?”

“No.”

She replied, “Good. I intend to clear up the disputes regarding the Sirius Black estate tomorrow. At the conclusion, I expect that Mr. Potter will be identified as the sole heir of the estate. It is my expectation that he will not give his permission for you to allow to continue using his home as your personal clubhouse. Therefore, I am

formally requesting that you remove all wards and charms that you have placed on the home by the end of this week.”

Deep down, she knew that he would never do as she had directed, but he had made a career out of extending his actual authority with influence, and she rarely had the opportunity to take a few jabs at him. She asked, “Are there any questions?”

“No.”

“Professor, do you intend to comply with both of these orders?”

“No.”

Losing her patience she asked, “Professor, do you really want to be arrested in front of your students?”

Dumbledore knew that this was not the time to make a stand on the issue. He would try again tomorrow. He replied, “I would prefer not to. For now, I will comply with your requests. Goodnight Director. Harry, please be careful. I don’t need to say the reason.” He vanished. This had not gone the way that he had expected. Obviously Harry was still mad about last week. He originally expected to have been in and out in a minute or two. He was surprised that Amelia had turned up so quickly after he had watched her leave.

Amelia was shocked that Dumbledore would go to such lengths to physically have custody of the boy. Dumbledore’s actions were very divisive to the light side.

She asked Shacklebolt to proceed to her office, giving him the option of being manacled or not. He chose to go quietly, escorted by four of the other Aurors.

Amelia introduced the Grangers and Harry to Senior Auror Jamie Church. She was a no nonsense woman about 35 years old. She had been in the Auror academy when Voldemort was last in power, and like the other trainees, had been in awe of the story of Harry the boy who lived. She had been a few years younger than his parents, but had been in school when James and Lilly were head boy and girl.

True to her word, Church was inconspicuous. In fact they could not see her. Like Harry's minders from the summer before, Church remained hidden, either under a cloak, or disillusioned. Dan came out a few minutes later, called for her and gave her a key to the back door to let herself in as needed.

When Arthur arrived back home, he knew that he was in trouble with his family. Molly was angry with him for not insisting that Harry spend the summer with them. Ginny was furious that he stopped back at Grimmauld place and reported to McGonagall that he had found Harry. Ron was angry with everyone for keeping secrets from him.

Arthur felt that the best thing to do was to support Dumbledore who had asked that any news regarding Harry be reported directly to him, or Minerva.

Unfortunately his loyalty to Dumbledore would come at a cost with the rest of his family. Harry and Ginny had specifically asked him not to say anything and within two minutes of leaving Harry, he had broken that trust.

Ginny knew far better than either of her parents or her brother that Harry was the sort of guy that trusted people slowly and simply shut them out of his life if they broke his trust.

Like Ginny, Minerva McGonagall also felt betrayed and used. Any fool could see that Dumbledore had used herself and Miss Tonks to do his dirty work for him. Now Tonks was facing documented disciplinary action for threatening a muggle – a black mark that time wouldn't erase unless Harry Potter himself made an appeal to the effect, or became head of the Aurors.

She viewed her own actions with disgust. She had no business going to Miss Granger's lovely home and insisting that Harry be moved to that dreadful mansion. Personally, she had been delighted to hear

that the Doctors had invited Harry into their home for the summer and wanted nothing more for the young man than to see him be happy for a few weeks.

She'd previously had no idea that Lilly and James had specifically requested that Harry go to Sirius. She thought of that night nearly fifteen years ago. Likely as not, if baby Harry had been placed in Black's care, he never would have gone after Pettigrew that evening and the little rat would have been caught another day. Harry would have had a normal childhood in the care of a good man. Black most likely would have settled down and married that girl who had looked up to him.

What had given Albus the right to make those decisions? She was truly angry with him for the first time that she could even remember.

Rita Skeeter smelled a scoop. Not having seen the story in the Times about the fire at Little Whinging, she had not known that Harry's relatives had been killed until she overheard the two Aurors talking in the entryway at the Ministry. 'The orphan who lived. Orphaned again. Another notch in his tragedy belt.' She wasn't happy with any of those angles. Maybe she would try to the angle about his dodging death yet again.

Why hadn't he been in their home at the time? School was out and his relatives would have picked him up. Either he left as soon as he got home..., or he never arrived. So the hundred Galleon question was, Where's Potter?

She thought about it. He most likely remained in Dumbledore's care, especially after that business at the Department of Mysteries a week ago, or he ran off. He's too young to run off in a big way. He's probably at the Weasleys. She'd check in the morning.

No one had knocked on their door for ten minutes now, so Dan and Emma hoped that the night's excitement was over. Obviously more had happened last week than they had been told. Dan was a pretty straightforward guy and the only thing he'd witnessed from Dumbledore and his followers were half-truths and manipulation.

Tomorrow was Friday, and they didn't have any patients scheduled. Maybe they'd have an outing of some sort and talk with the kids.

Dan and Emma were about to turn in when they noticed Harry sitting on the sofa in the library.

Dan smiled at him and asked, "What are you reading?"

Harry looked up and replied, "A book on protecting your home with magic. There's some pretty good stuff in here on hiding your home against your choice of either magical or non-magical people. There's a chapter on setting up an anti-apparation zone, and here's a chapter on..." Harry grew silent.

Emma noticed the change in the young man and asked, "What is it, Harry?"

Harry looked at her and said, "It's a section on fireproofing a home. It looks like an easy enough charm and the book says that it lasts an entire year."

Dan said, "The fire wasn't your fault, Harry. You didn't set it. Second guessing yourself is usually unproductive. Maybe you could show it to us tomorrow"

Emma patted him on the shoulder and said, "It's late. Come to bed now."

Harry had virtually no previous recollection of caring parents. It felt good.

Over many years Albus Dumbledore had become quite accustomed to getting his own way. He hadn't gotten his way once today. Between the dressing down that he had received in Amelia's office, and the disciplinary action that Tonks, Arthur and Kingsley faced, his Order was in serious disarray.

He would never feel that Harry would be sufficiently protected at the Granger residence. Popular decision or not, he felt that Harry's ultimate destiny in the war outweighed his individual desire to have a good time visiting with the Granger girl.

He wondered what had really happened on the platform. He hadn't been in close enough contact with Harry to find that memory. Regardless of the initiating actions by Moody and the others, the fact remained that Harry's last remaining relatives were dead, and he needed to be moved immediately, either to the castle or Grimmauld place.

Perhaps he could be persuaded to move to a safer location if it were demonstrated that the Granger home in Crawley was not a safe place. He would have to think about that move very carefully.

Harry got up early on Friday. He went outside to do the chores in the back garden. Auror Jamie Church watched him with interest as he clipped the hedge and pulled weeds in the yard. He really did look like her recollection of James Potter when he was that age. Somehow she couldn't reconcile the image of the famous Harry Potter who was the subject of a half dozen Teen Witch poster with the young man pulling weeds mornings at six AM.

She decided to test his reflexes and see how big of a protection risk he represented. She crept up to him and was going to say hello. When she was about fifteen feet from him she accidentally stepped on a tiny twig. In a flash, Harry had his wand out and had fired a stunner at her, squarely hitting her disillusioned shape. Five minutes later she was being revived. Harry was apologizing profusely.

She smiled at him and said, "Well done Harry. You had no way of knowing that I was a friendly. You did the right thing. I'm only glad that you didn't fire anything stronger. Merlin, you're fast."

"I'm sorry, Auror Church. I've had a hard time the last few weeks."

"Cor, I'd say so too if I'd run into half of the trouble that you've seen. So what's up with Professor Dumbledore?"

"He's had this lifelong idea that I need protecting. Maybe Voldemort is after me. He's after a lot of people. No offense Auror Church, but mostly I just want to be left alone."

"Please call me Jamie, Harry. I understand your desire to be left alone, but that probably isn't in your immediate future. Besides Voldemort and crew, a lot of other people want to be associated with you, have their products endorsed by you, or have their daughters or grand daughters date you. That's just the way it is. You may have been shielded from much of that earlier on, but it's real. You'll have to be the judge of your friends and acquaintances real intentions. I'm sorry."

Harry replied, "Don't be. People have been staring at my scar either awestruck, afraid, or insanely jealous since I've been eleven. That's one of the reasons that I like Hermione. She sees me, just Harry, and she likes me anyway. She's my best friend."

"She's a lucky girl," said Church.

"No, I'm the lucky one," replied Harry. "She always stood up for me when no one else did. She's put herself and her family at risk by being friends with me. She took me in when my uncle left me at the train station."

"Maybe you're good for each other," said Church.

Slightly embarrassed at her words, Harry replied, "I need to go make breakfast now. Can I get you anything?"

"Coffee if you have any."

"I'll make some, said Harry. "Cream, sugar, or black?"

"Black, please."

Harry went in, started the coffee and put the cinnamon rolls that he had started the previous evening in the oven. When the coffee was done, he brought a mug out to Jamie, thanked her for helping them, and went back inside. He reread the chapter on warding an area.

Fortunately, the next person to get up was Hermione. She was wearing a pair of tan shorts and a high necked top. She seemed to have spent a bit of time with her hair. Harry poured her a coffee and they sat together in the library.

Harry quietly asked her, "What were your folks told about the Department of Mysteries?"

She thought about it for a moment. Based on the little that they'd asked, they either knew every little detail and had elected not to bring it up, or had been told next to nothing, and didn't know to ask. She replied, "Probably nothing. Why?"

Harry thought about Dumbledore and didn't put it past the old wizard to try to use that as leverage to regain more control on him. He replied, "If they knew the details, there would be less leverage for the professor to use. I've got enough secrets to share with you as it is."

She looked into his emerald green eyes, as he raised his gaze and looked into her bright brown eyes. She smiled at him for a moment, appreciating his attention. She asked him, "Are you OK with talking about Sirius?"

Harry weighed the words that her parents had used last night. They didn't seem like judgmental people. The best that could happen with full disclosure would be that her parents would be better prepared to deal with the dangers that were there. As Auror Church had mentioned, whether someone had been shielded from them from the

dangers that existed and knew about them or not, they were real. In the worst case, they could react badly and make every attempt to withdraw their daughter from the wizarding world. Given that Hermione had already been licensed to practice magic, the move would be almost moot. In the middle ground, they could easily chuck him out of their home, recognizing the risk that he had brought into their lives.

Gryffindors charged ahead. Harry said, "Let me get breakfast started first. We should tell them everything."

At breakfast, Dan and Emma asked Harry if he had a passport. Harry smiled, and said "Other than Hogwarts, the farthest I've ever been is a few trips to London. The Dursleys never took me anywhere. They either left me in my cupboard, or at Mrs. Figg's house. Director Bones could get me one." Emma didn't understand the comment about the cupboard, but would ask Hermione about it later.

The cinnamon rolls were delicious. Emma brought a couple out to the Auror who was outside as well as another cup of coffee.

Dan asked if Harry wanted to go visit Sherwood Forest and see Nottingham castle. Harry thought that sounded fantastic, Hermione liked to ride in the car and it would be a good opportunity to have a discussion.

They finished their leisurely breakfast. Harry went with Dan when he went to the BP petrol station. Harry felt better about himself wearing his new clothing. They returned and were introduced to Auror Connie Hammer. She was a no nonsense woman who looked like she'd been classmates with Moody, except that the years on the job had been kinder to her. She had fiery red hair, her sharp blue eyes were her own and all of her body parts appeared to be original equipment.

After greeting the Grangers, Director Bones introduced her to Harry. She looked him over, gave a smile and said, "Stone the crows. It is you. I'm pleased to meet you." She shook his hand. "Good work last week with Macnair and Malfoy. Tis a shame that Bellatrix got away to hurt someone again. She's a mean one. I helped Moody take her

down the first time. It was a bloody nightmare.” Harry nodded in agreement.

Dan showed her around the yard and his home, and then they left for the day. They got on the M4 motorway and began the outing.

After they had been in the car for a few minutes, Emma made his job a lot easier, saying, “Hermione mentioned that you wanted to tell us a bit about yourself.” Harry looked over at her as she ran her finger across her chest, smiled at him and nodded.

For nearly an hour, Harry told them of his life, beginning with the little that he knew of his parents, Halloween 1981, being taken to the Dursleys, and growing up there. He talked candidly of the abuses that he had taken at the hands of his uncle and cousin. He mentioned living in a cupboard off of the kitchen, being the Dursleys’ house elf and finally being rescued by Hagrid when he was eleven.

He talked about their adventures at school, beginning with what Hermione still thought of as the most romantic moment of her life, being rescued from the clutches of a twelve foot Mountain Troll.

As he moved through the years, Emma and Dan sensed a darker tone in his words. There was less of the beauty and wonder of the magical world like meeting unicorns and more of the darkness of the politics. They sensed that the pure blood attitudes held all of the trappings of wealth and power with none of the compassion for the betterment of mankind. Silently they ached as he told of the constant insults that their daughter had endured at the hands of a few. They swelled with pride when he told them of Hermione’s kindness to the elves and willingness to help other students

Harry told them of his Godfather trying to assist him in his fourth year, living in the hills outside Hogsmede. He told them of the tri-wizard tournament, and the different tasks, ending with the rebirth of Voldemort. He told them of the events of the last year – The DA, the attack on Mr. Weasley, and the events in June.

Finally Harry came back to the lighter aspects of the wizarding world including the Nifflers, Christmas with Sirius, playing Quidditch,

spending time with Hermione, Ron, Neville and Ginny. He tried to balance out the wonderment with the danger.

It was a lot to absorb. Much of the story was new to Dan and Emma, some had been retold from a different perspective. What came out was they were spending the summer hosting a young man of rock-solid character, who obviously thought the world of their daughter. It also came out that there was very real danger within that world, and the boogey men in question wore black robes and white masks.

"They probably stole the idea from Halloween," quipped Dan, trying to lighten the mood.

"Huh?" asked Harry.

"Those American horror movies where the evil bloke runs around in the hockey mask killing all of the young girls."

Harry had seen parts of one of those movies. The difference was these killers were all too real and to a large extent, he was the ongoing target.

The time spent at Nottingham was interesting. Harry wondered if one of the evil characters of the Robin Hood legends might have been a dark wizard, or simply a mean spirited person. They had lunch in the Manor Lodge Pub. The waitress jokingly told them that the building was haunted. They all laughed about it with the waitress. They were having their lunch when Hermione spotted one of the Hogwarts ghosts; the fat friar coming through the wall. Hermione poked Harry, who nodded at him.

Hermione looked up and said, "Friar Tuck, I presume?"

The Friar looked delighted and floated over to her, saying, "It's good to see you again, Miss Granger, and Mr. Potter. I spend my summers back at my native home, making noises and helping the locals." He waved at them. "I'll see you in September."

Dan had felt something cold but had been unable to see the old Friar. He asked, "What was that?"

His brilliant daughter smiled and replied, "That was Friar Tuck. He spends most of the year in the castle, and comes here for the summers."

Harry nodded at Emma, shrugged his shoulders and said, "Magic."

They walked around Nottingham for a bit longer until it was time to go. On the way back, Dan asked, "So how do these civil wars within the wizard world get resolved?"

Hermione replied, "They typically end with the death or assassination of the dark leader in question. The goblin rebellion of 1742 ended when..."

A few minutes later Harry added, "Hermione has a good point. Professor Dumbledore ended the reign of Grindelwald in 1945 by defeating him in a Bavarian castle."

"Right," said Hermione, "and the first reign of Voldemort ended in 1981 when he was defeated by..." she realized that she had created an awkward moment for her good friend.

"Me," finished Harry.

"But how?" asked Dan

"And why?" asked Emma.

"A month before I was born," said Harry, "Professor Dumbledore was interviewing for instructors when one made a magical prediction, called a prophecy. It went like this:

"The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches..."

Born to those who have thrice defied him, Born as the seventh month dies...

And the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he will have powers that the Dark Lord knows not...

And either must die at the hands of the other, for neither can live while the other survives...

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord will be born as the seventh month dies."

Harry finished, saying, "Professor Trelawney made that prophecy."

"She's nothing but a fraud," scoffed Hermione. She was both awed by his words and unaccepting of their origin.

"Maybe," said Harry, "but my parents and Godfather among others were killed over that Prophecy. One of Voldemort's spies heard the first two lines and told it to him. Voldemort believed it. My parents had previously been involved in three skirmishes with him. After I was born, he went looking for me. They'd gone into hiding, and were staying at their summer cottage that was under one of the charms that I was reading about, the Fidelius charm. The man who knew the secret betrayed my parents and gave away their location."

Harry took a small piece of rope from out of his pocket. "Apparently they'd thought of everything except having an emergency portkey like Director bones gave us. They must have had no way of escape. A wooden house wasn't worth dying for." He was silent for a moment.

"Anyway, when he attacked me, the protection that my mother had charmed me with somehow rebounded the killing curse that he'd fired at me and it hit him. It ripped the spirit from his body, effectively ending the last war for eleven years." He pointed to his forehead. "His curse marked me with this scar."

"Apparently Dumbledore believes the prophecy. He's been interfering with my life ever since. He's been bending laws and rules ever since to keep me under his thumb."

Harry continued. "So learning of the magical world has been a double edged sword for me. It got me out of living in a cupboard and sleeping on an old crib mattress. I've met some wonderful people and made some fantastic friends, but I've had people gawking at me since

the first day that I stepped into the Leakey Cauldron.” Tears welled in Emma’s eyes as Harry told his tale. In every sense, she could feel his pain.

Harry took a breath and finished by saying, “That said, I’d like you to reconsider your offer to have me stay with you this summer. I thought it would have been kept quieter, but it looks like I’m destined to be the centerpiece in some sort of strange custody battle. I don’t want to place you in any more risk than you already are.”

Emma squeezed Dan’s arm. They knew what they had to do.

Dan said, “Thank you Harry. From you and because of you, we’ve learned more about the magical world in the last few days than the last five years. You gave us full disclosure, a concept that your professors seem to have forgotten about.”

Emma joined in, saying, “You and my husband share some common traits. In your own ways, you’re both incredibly brave people. You’re both kind and gentle at heart. You’re both pretty straightforward men. You both have a determination to use the gifts that you were given and make the world a better place because of it.” Harry listen as she spoke.

“Dan was born to be good with his hands and has incredible eye-hand coordination. As a result, he makes a fantastic dentist. Auror Church told me that you have the fastest reflexes of any human she’s seen and that you set her straight this morning when she tried to sneak up on you at six when you were trimming our hedge.”

She finished, saying, “Harry, there are bad people out there that would like to hurt Hermione whether you are here or not. To answer your question, I feel much safer with you by our daughter than away from her. We’re pleading with you to stay with us and help keep her safe. In return, we’ll do everything that we can to provide you with a comfortable, normal, loving home. We will help you anyway that we know how. That said, Dan and I will leave the final decision to Hermione.”

Hermione had been listening to Harry tell his life story. He'd filled in the details that she'd consciously or unconsciously omitted telling her parents over the years. From the time that she'd been in the second grade until Halloween of her first year at Hogwarts, she'd never had a true friend. She'd come to recognize that much of that had been her emerging powers as a witch and her passion for learning, but it was real. Before she knew Harry, she'd lived a very lonely life.

She didn't know what her feelings were towards Harry. They varied from moment to moment, but there were some constants – kindness, respect, generosity and loyalty. They were true friends. She didn't know if her other feeling were love, lust, or simply a fifteen year old girl's hormones raging through her body, but she knew that her world was a bigger, brighter, happier place with Harry nearby. She knew that she would curse anyone into goo who tried to take him away. "Please stay." She gave his wrist a squeeze.

"That decided," continued Emma turning around and facing the two, "I do expect you both to follow the house rules." We share in the chores. I'll do the laundry and the bathrooms. Harry will do the cooking and Hermione will vacuum and dust. Dan will cut the grass and take care of the autos. Harry, if you insist on puttering out in the garden, at least let me help." She smiled at him for a moment.

Putting on a more serious face, she said. "I don't expect to catch you to together studying all of the time. There are outings to the mall, movies, the zoo, and trips to go on. Harry needs to learn to swim properly, learn a bit about golf and tennis, theatre and such."

She finished saying, "Tomorrow we will make appointments for visits to the optometrist, and you both should have your teeth looked at. Now that you both have your licenses, we were hoping that you could show us a bit of magic. It can't all be about fighting, is it?"

They both shook their heads.

Emma asked, "Harry, did your aunt and uncle ever teach you how to ride a bicycle?"

Harry shook his head.

“Hermione, please add that to your list.”

Unable to wait any longer, Dan, asked, “You really talked with Friar Tuck?”

Hermione replied, “Loads of times. He is the house ghost for Hufflepuff house. When Harry and I were in our second year we got invited to Sir Nicolas de Mimsy Porpington’s 500th deathday party. They’d invited ghosts from...”

A few minutes later Emma smiled and said, “We’re home.”

Albus Dumbledore had other ideas for Harry’s summer.

Chapter 5

Death Eaters Attack Again – Boy-Who-Lived is Missing

Story by Rita Skeeter

Earlier this week the home of Harry Potter's last remaining relatives was destroyed in what has been allowed to become a far too common occurrence. A group of Death Eaters sealed the home and ignited the outside of the home.

Diligent research by this reporter revealed that the inhabitants of the home were alive, as the muggle fire and police departments had reported several frantic calls for help from Harry Potter's Aunt. The first call was received at 6:17 PM and the last call at 6:22.

Embattled Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge had been unaware that yet another attack had occurred and reportedly was conducting a business meeting at the Old Course at the time. This reporter believes that a call for a vote of no confidence is eminent.

Nymphadora Tonks felt terrible as she read the article. She had been sent home on a three-day suspension and hadn't left her flat. The Dursley house must have been torched while she was reporting that the wards had come down.

Had she been wrong to report back to Dumbledore? Strictly speaking their assignment had been to guard Harry, not a home. She was in so much trouble at work. Director Bones took a very hard line on abuse of power situations. She had been up for a grade advancement review in six months. She was certain that this suspension would gut those chances. Either way, she would be glad to get back to work tomorrow morning.

Saturday evening Dumbledore was meeting with Amos Diggory. He was an Order member and one of the leading choices to be named to succeed Fudge should a vote of no confidence be passed.

The process had three related parts that had to be well coordinated. Any of the department heads could initiate and circulate a petition to take a vote of no confidence. Of the fifteen departments and sub-departments, a simple majority would be required to pass the petition.

If passed, the combination of the Wizengamot with sixty members and the department heads would vote. A two-thirds majority was required to pass. Making the overall effort easier were the recent arrests at the Department of Mysteries. Lucius Malfoy had been a particularly influential lobbyist.

If failed, tradition called that the department head that initiated the petition would resign from the ministry.

The fact of the matter was that Fudge, while an adequate peacetime steward had no tactical skills to wage an effective end to what could quickly become an all out civil war within the wizarding world.

While unfortunate in of itself, the attack on the Dursleys could sway a few votes if framed within the context that the ministry had insufficient manpower to wage war against the Death Eaters. Manpower that Fudge had refused to authorize despite two documented requests.

Dumbledore was certain that he had the necessary votes within the Wizengamot. He was less certain of the department heads. Certainly Arthur, Amelia, Amos, Mafalda, Miranda, and Croaker could be counted on. Edgecombe, Wiss and Michaels could most likely vote for Fudge/against him. Dumbledore did not know which way Wallace, Johnson, Turnbull, Grant, Drummond, or Holly Bruce the new head of Magical Sports would vote.

He had six votes, and needed eight with six undecided. He wanted to be certain that the department head vote would go at least ten-five before asking Arthur to risk his career and author the petition. What he really needed was a well-known well-respected outsider to take a public stand against Fudge. What he really needed was Harry Potter.

He decided to call a special meeting of the Order that Sunday evening.

Things at the Weasley home had only gotten worse in the last day. Ginny had written Fred and George a letter regarding the scene at the platform, the subsequent attack at the Dursleys and her father going to check on Harry. She was so angry with her father for ratting out Harry's location to Dumbledore.

Molly wasn't sure that Arthur had done the right thing either, but supported his decision in front of the children. She so wished that Harry had come to them for help. She still wasn't positive of Hermione's motives with Harry after the articles that Skeeter had written several years ago.

She thought, 'He must be so distraught over Sirius' death'.

"Eight diamonds," bid Dan looking across at his partner Harry, who had bid seven on a wing and a prayer. Dan picked up the joker, left bower, and two diamonds in the blind, leading him to question what had caused Harry to bid in the first place. Then again, he had originally raised Harry's bid based upon having only an Ace and king of hearts, so his hand hadn't been rock solid either.

Dan reflected that Hermione had been so much more enjoyable to have home this summer than last. They were actually talking with each other about things as opposed to her politely answering any question that they had thought to ask. He didn't know how much of the change was due to Harry being there, or perhaps his daughter was just getting older, but either way, it was a pleasant change.

Dan reached over to collect the eighth trick and accidentally spilled his coffee, knocking the cup unto the carpet and breaking it.

"I'll get a rag," said Emma.

Hermione said, "I'll get it." Carefully pulling out her wand and pointing it, she said, "Reparo." The cup was as good as new. "Scourgify." The coffee stain was gone. With a flick and swish of her wand and the

words, "Wingardium Leviosa," the cup was back on the table in front of her astonished father.

"Well done," he said.

His daughter beamed at him. Without a license, she had never been in a position to show her parents what she had been learning at school. Harry sat at the table, smiling at his best friend, as she was having one of the best moments of her life.

"Can you show us something else?" asked Emma, equally interested.

Hermione looked at the pencil that they had been using to score the game and transfigured it into a cricket bat.

"Brilliant!" said Emma.

"Magic," replied Harry. "Hermione is every bit as good in the practical parts of magic as she is with the theory."

Hermione gave a small laugh. "Harry, I only wish that were true. You were a more powerful wizard by your third year than I'd ever hope to be. You're leaps and bounds ahead of me there. Not in books and school tests, but in actual application." She looked at him meaningfully.

"What do you mean?" asked Dan who was amused watching the two together.

"When we were learning transfiguration or charms - the sort of things that you just saw, I would be the first to be able to demonstrate them. Once he learned them, Harry's would always be the best. I could fix tea cup first using the Repairo spell, but now that he knows it, Harry could probably use it to fix an entire house. When he was fourteen, Harry had trouble learning a summoning spell, but once he knew it, he summoned his broomstick to come to him from almost a mile away."

Deep down, Harry knew that the young lady with the pretty brown eyes was right. Even Ollivander had seen it five years ago. He did

possess a lot of raw power, but was short in the theory. He suggested, "Maybe we should practice together, now that we can."

Emma looked at her best friend, winked, and knew that he was thinking the same thing. "You two can sit up and discuss your plans. Dan and I are going to bed. Goodnight."

"Goodnight," said both teens at once.

"So according to the book, it's all legal to use, provided that you're using the charms on your own home, or you have the owner's written permission to perform them," said Hermione in an I'm sure of my facts voice.

Harry grew introspective for a moment. 'That's what she meant. Sirius hadn't put them on his home. The professor had. One condition had probably been heaped on top of another and Sirius had become imprisoned in his own home.'

"Harry?"

"I was just thinking about Sirius. Professor Dumbledore warded him inside his own home. His last year wasn't much better than the other twelve that he spent in prison, except that his bed was more comfortable and the taunts from Snape about not helping were more personal."

Hermione listened in patient silence, looking at her friend encouragingly. Harry had never talked about Sirius since his death, and probably needed to.

Harry continued, "I think he was happier in our fourth year living in that cave than he was stuck at that house. The only time that I saw him happy was last Christmas when he knew that he'd have a house full of people."

“He had you there Harry,” she added. “You were the bright beautiful spot in his life. You were his hope for a happy future Harry. All he wanted was for you to be happy doing whatever it was that you were doing. I’m sure he was delighted to watch you having fun drinking half of the pool the other day.” She lightly touched his cheek and smiled at him.

“Maybe, but Dumbledore was so busy worrying about his safety that he forgot to consider that he’d taken away his happiness.” Hermione wasn’t sure if Harry was talking about Sirius or himself.

Harry continued. “It’s no wonder he insisted on going that night. Nobody likes to be locked up in their room. I didn’t. I didn’t deserve it either.” Hermione saw the tears welled in his eyes. She put her arms around Harry.

“Did it happen often?”

“When I was eight, they locked me in my cupboard after school for a month. I had accidentally apparated away from a bunch of bullies. They wouldn’t even let me out to use the toilet. I never did anything to deserve it. Why didn’t he come and rescue me? He knew bout it.”

“Who?”

“Dumbledore. When my first school letter came, it was addressed to me at the cupboard under the stairs. He knew that’s where they kept me. After my first year at school, they locked me in my room for over a month until Fred and George rescued me. I was so hungry. Tears were flowing down his cheeks unto her shoulder.”

Harry wiped his face with his wrist and said, “Until your mum took me to Harvey Nichols, I’d never had a pair of jeans of my own that fit me. All those times I was in Dumbledore’s office he had to have seen that my trainers were full of tape. He could have helped me.”

She kissed his cheek. “Harry, we’ll burn all those old things tomorrow. I never minded. Ginny or Ron never minded. I’m sure that Cho never cared. Pavatti didn’t mind. I’m not minimizing what you’re saying and I can’t even imagine being locked up in a little cupboard, but don’t

confuse wealth with personal worth. You were my best friend when you didn't have five quid in your pocket. I never cared. I felt bad that you didn't have nicer things to wear, but I never thought less of you as a person."

She hugged her friend and said, "I'm sorry that professor Dumbledore allowed that to happen to Sirius, and I'm especially sorry that he allowed those things to happen to you. We can only guess at his reasons, and we don't have to agree with them. Please believe me when I say, I'll never let you go hungry for anything." 'I love you Harry Potter, and I'll take care of you.'

"Thanks. I'd do the same for you."

"It's late Harry. Goodnight."

"Goodnight."

Minerva, Arthur, Tonks, Kingsley, Moody and Lupin sat together at the Order meeting on Sunday night. Individually they felt guilty for their actions and especially the deaths of three people, damage to careers, or estrangement from family. Minerva was as angry at Dumbledore as she ever had been. She felt that she had been a part of the worst crime against Harry – stealing him from his rightful guardian, Sirius Black all those years ago.

The events and revelations of the last week had not simply been a case of rationalizing that the end justifying the means. In reality, the Order was in real danger of disintegrating.

The members had been led from one bad decision to another. Each had been well meaning, but few had withstood the light of day. An unbiased observer might ask if they had been following Dumbledore as blindly as Riddle's followers had been following him.

Dumbledore told the members that Harry had been found and that he was currently in the care of several of the Senior Aurors. Molly asked about his future living arrangements.

Dumbledore replied, "Indeed, that shall be the topic of a hearing with several of the family placement justices on Monday morning. I have petitioned that Harry become a ward of the school for this and next summer. I believe that would be the best move for his safety."

Remus Lupin, who owed so much to the professor, wondered if the good professor wasn't a victim of not invented here syndrome when it came to Harry's safety. He had talked with Arthur before the meeting and was delighted that Harry had been invited to stay at a home where he was welcome.

Dumbledore continued, "On another matter, I believe the time has come for Cornelius to be replaced with a leader who can better guide the wizarding world through its current dilemma."

The same unbiased outsider could see that Dumbledore was hoping to implement a change in the wizarding government. Some would call it a vote of no confidence led by a man respected by most in spite of his personal eccentricities, Arthur Weasley. Others would see it as a bloodless coup masterminded by Albus Dumbledore.

When the papers were signed and routed on Tuesday, it would be Arthur Weasley whose livelihood was on the line. If Dumbledore had to wait a week to secure Harry's safety in order to get his endorsement of Dumbledore's other project, he would be patient.

After the meeting he asked Severus to meet privately with him back at his office in an hour. He found out that Kingsley's hearing was to be held Monday afternoon. He had been charged with illegal search, trespassing and abuse of power against a muggle. If found guilty, as he surely would unless the Grangers specifically dropped the charges, Shacklebolt would be fined and dismissed from the force.

Dumbledore had no worry that the Grangers could be talked into dropping the charges. He would simply mention that the selection for the next year's Head Girl had become a little closer than previously assumed due to the yet unreleased OWL scores. It was obvious that Hermione had begun her quest for the Head Girl honor the day that she had received her first year letter. Surely they wouldn't let a small

indiscretion from a well-meaning Auror cloud that future. Besides a Head Girl distinction might be worth an extra hundred Galleons a month in her first job offer. Her parents were hard working professionals and would appreciate the significance of his offer.

He would take care of everything. He always did.

On Monday morning Harry woke up at 5:30, showered and got dressed. He made coffee and brought some out to Auror Church who was outside. Harry went back in, and reread the book on protecting homes.

As he went out to bring her another cup, he received a message from an owl.

Mr. Potter,

Your presence is requested at Gringotts on Monday 8 July, at 9:00 AM. Your legal status will be reviewed and you will have some documents to sign regarding the Sirius Black Estate.

The presence of Miss Hermione Granger is also requested at the same time. If they wish, her parents may attend. If you wish, you may also bring a legal representative, though that is not necessary.

When you arrive, please ask to see head goblin Ragnot.

Best wishes,

Amelia Bones

That was three hours from now. A few minutes later, Emma came out and greeted Harry and Auror Church. Harry showed her the letter that he received. She said, "Dan and I don't have any appointments before 1:30 this afternoon. We will be more than happy to take you. If you would like, we'll attend."

Harry nodded. "Thank you. I think there might be a lot of money being discussed. It really won't change things. I didn't earn any of it."

"Harry, no one earns those sorts of things, they just happen. I'm sorry that you have to keep going through these things, but I want you to know that Dan and I'll help you in any way that we can. OK?"

Harry nodded and said, "Thanks."

They arrived at the Leakey Cauldron with fifteen minutes to spare. Auror Church agreed to accompany them to Gringotts and wait for them in the lobby. They made their way to Gringotts. Harry was wearing a nicer set of gray robes that he had. They were shown into one of the conference rooms. Seated at the table were Ragnot, Remus, McGonagall, Dumbledore, Director Bones, and three others that Harry had not met.

Dan, Hermione, Harry, and Emma, nodded and said hello to everyone and they sat down together.

Ragnot said, "There are two items of business this morning. There is the reading of the now undisputed Will of Sirius Orion Black, and a custody hearing for Mr. Harry James Potter. First to the Will." He produced a parchment and began reading.

"I Sirius Black, indicate that this is my final Will, dated 7, May 1996.

To Minerva McGonagall, I leave twenty five thousand Galleons. Please use a bit of the gold to make certain that the Gryffindor team members all have decent brooms. I wish you the best.

To Albus Dumbledore, I leave one Galleon, and Kreacher. You took away my last chance at happiness fifteen years ago. You let me go to prison for twelve years knowing that there was every likelihood that I was innocent. You made me a prisoner in my own home. I have forgiven you for Azkaban, but I will never forgive you for the other. I hope that you think long and hard about the justice in your actions. People need freedom of choice.

To Remus Lupin, I leave one hundred thousand Galleons. You have the gold. There's no giving it back. May you never suffer or want for anything again my friend. Please keep an eye on Harry and help him when he asks you to.

To Hermione Granger, I leave twenty five thousand Galleons. You are a brave, beautiful, remarkable young witch of exceptional loyalty. I hope you remain best friends with Harry for the rest of what I hope are very long lives together.

To Harry Potter, I leave all of my personal property, and the Black estate. If there is someone that you believe that I missed, feel free to pass a bit around. Please keep most of it. Someday it might come in handy. I'm sorry that I wasn't here to watch you live your life. Please do what you need to do, and never lose sight of brilliant witches who truly care about you. I have papers signed that would authorize your emancipation as an adult. You have the funds, you have the maturity, and in my opinion, it would be best for you. Harry you don't need another guardian. You don't need to be stuck living with your horrible relatives. You need your friends and you need to be tutored by the finest experts that gold can buy. Kick his arse when you are done from Lilly and James. I wish you a long and happy life. Love Sirius.

Ragnot handed Harry several papers, detailing the sizeable holdings.

Ragnot said, "Mr. Potter, you can review the documents and sign them later in the morning. The next item is in relation to your status. Wizengamot judges Wallace, Barclay, and Ferguson will review your options and consider your request."

A woman about Molly's age spoke. She looked like a slightly older version of Emma Granger. "Mr. Potter, my name is Diane Wallace. This is John Barclay and Taylor Ferguson." Harry shook the two witches and the wizard's hands. She continued. "It is our stated bias that the wishes of a child's parents are nearly sacred and should not be tampered with without extraordinary reason."

Harry looked at her and nodded.

Judge Ferguson asked, "Where are you currently living, Mr. Potter?"

Harry replied, "I was invited to spend the summer with one of my school friends and her parents. They invited me and I accepted before anything had happened to the Dursleys."

Amelia cut in. "Excuse me, Judge Ferguson. Professor Dumbledore, do you have any business related to this hearing?"

Harry replied, "He can stay. He's a great wizard. I may not agree with his advice, or always follow it, but I would like to hear it."

'There is hope,' thought Dumbledore. "I have petitioned the Wizengamot to have Harry become a ward of the school with Professor Minerva McGonagall to be responsible for Harry well being until he reaches the age of seventeen. It is my belief that Harry should be immersed in the wizarding world culture where he doubtless will become a prominent member. It is also my desire that he receive additional protection from the dangers that continuously face him, and not to expose Miss Granger's parents to any undue danger. Harry has rather unique safety requirements."

He hadn't gotten the reaction that he'd hoped for from the Grangers. He had expected that they'd push Harry out of their home at the mention of danger to their daughter. Instead they just sat there, politely looking at him. 'They simply didn't realize the level of threat that Riddle represented'.

He continued. "It is my belief that the current dark lord, Tom Riddle known as Lord Voldemort will need to be defeated not by my generation, rather by Harry's. The followers that Riddle is currently recruiting are not of my generation, but Harry's."

Dan asked, "Is there a conscription into your world's military service – the Aurors, as there is with the Queen's military?"

"Certainly not," said Bones somewhat ruffled. "It is an elite, all volunteer organization."

Dan continued, "Could my sixteen year old daughter join such an organization this afternoon if she choose?"

Bones had never considered such a request. "Possibly an exception could be made. I understand that she has exceptional intelligence. Normally we wouldn't accept a candidate until they were eighteen. Dr. Granger, what is your point?"

Dan smiled a bit. He should have been a solicitor. "My point is that by your own rules, the professor's concerns over Harry's activities this summer are almost moot. Surely you weren't planning on teaching him assassination techniques this week were you Professor?"

In truth, Dumbledore hadn't planned anything for Harry for the summer, though it had now become obvious to him that that was exactly what was needed. He responded, "There is much to learn." Minerva scowled at him.

Emma asked, "Professor, would you be so quick to send your own grandson off to war?"

Dumbledore replied, "I was largely responsible for ending the war with the last dark lord, Grindelwald."

Emma would not be sidetracked so easily. "I'm not discounting your achievements, professor, but you really didn't answer my question."

Dumbledore admitted that she had a point. "I would not. I would find a way to ensure his happiness and if necessary, provide him with every skill and advantage available to ensure his success."

Dan was truly angry at the man, but held it in saying, "With all due respect Professor, you have done neither of those things for Harry Potter. I cannot train Harry or Hermione to be soldiers or an assassin if that truly is their destiny as you have predicted. I can provide them with a loving home during the school holiday and Director Bones has done much to ensure their safety."

Judge Wallace cut in. "This is indeed an interesting discussion, but it is somewhat off-track from topic."

Minerva was livid. Dumbledore had never mentioned her taking Harry on as a ward. Sirius was right – people need a freedom of choice.

Judge Wallace looked at Minerva. “Professor McGonagall, is it your formal request that Harry be placed in your custody until he is seventeen. Is it your belief that Harry would be safest with you?”

She gave Dumbledore a last look and replied, “It is your Honor.”

Wallace continued. “Harry, do you believe yourself capable of handling your own personal and financial affairs?”

Harry asked, “Will my answer affect my eligibility to continue my education at Hogwarts?”

Wallace replied, “The seven year education is available to all witches and wizards demonstrating sufficient ability who are able to afford the tuition, room and boarding fees. Your position as a student is open to you whether you are a ward of the Ministry, under guardianship, adopted by a family, or living independently. You must have a very full pensive to have considered such a point.”

Harry smiled at her. “To answer your question, yes I do. I largely trust that my financial affairs are in order as far as Gringotts is concerned. I have some decisions to make regarding the properties, but I’m certain that I will seek and receive good advice before making any decisions regarding sales of any of the properties.”

He took a sip of water and continued. “As I said, the Grangers have repeatedly offered to let me stay at their home for the summer. I would like to do that. They have provided me with a room of my own and clothing to wear. They’ve taken the time to get to know me, and I sincerely appreciate their generosity. If there are expenses that I should pay for the Aurors who are guarding the home, I will gladly pay them.”

Wallace smiled at him. “That is very responsible of you to offer, Harry. Given your contributions to the wizarding world, I see no need to assess you anything for the summer. So it is your formal request to

become an emancipated wizard in our society and be responsible for your own actions?"

"Yes Ma'am. However, I do appreciate the offer that Professor McGonagall made. It was very generous."

"It is indeed. You are fortunate to have two very attractive options."

Dumbledore could see where this was going, and elected not to argue. He wasn't looking to possess Harry, simply lead him to follow his way of thinking. 'I should have charmed the doors so Black couldn't have gotten out. This was so foreseeable and disrupts so many things.'

The three judges conferred for a few minutes then came back. Judge Barclay asked, "Mr. Potter before we announce our decision, do you have any other questions?"

Hermione, Dan, Emma, Amelia, Minerva, and Albus all had Harry's best interest in mind. Each was praying or silently hoping that their version of best interest would be chosen.

Judge Wallace looked at Dumbledore and McGonagall and smiled.

A/N

Should Harry intervene on behalf of Tonks and Kingsley? Is Dumbledore within his right to try and remove Fudge?

Your opinions are very helpful and will help make this a better story.

Chapter 6

Judge Wallace began describing her decision in the custody case. "Mr. Potter, Professor McGonagall has made a very generous offer indeed. Many in the wizarding world would believe that assigning Harry to her care would be the most responsible move that we could make today. On a personal basis, I happen to agree. However your parents' original wishes were not followed. The documents that Director Bones has previously presented clearly indicate that it was their request that their son be placed in the care of their friend Sirius Black in the event of their death. Pettigrew had not had his confrontation with Mr. Black until two and a half days following the Death of James and Lilly Potter."

She continued. "It is outside the scope of this hearing to understand how Harry was ever placed with his aunt and uncle, but the placement procedure was clearly violated. The overriding guidance is to be provided by the parent or guardian. Sirius Black was illegally stripped of his guardianship of Harry Potter. That much is clear. Black's wishes were to emancipate Harry in the event of his death in a document that is barely two months old."

Dumbledore had the manners not to agree the point.

She continued. "Supporting that is the Will of the people who were his appointed guardians at the time of their death, Vernon and Petunia Dursley. Their wishes were to have Harry live on his own, though the muggle legal language is a bit different from that used in the wizarding world, their intent was plain."

She finished, by asking, "Harry, Professor Dumbledore has continuously argued the overriding factor of consideration is your safety. What are your thoughts on that subject?"

"It is true that Voldemort has taken an unhealthy interest in me, as he has with anyone who chooses to know me. I was attacked nearly fifteen years ago in a home protected by the Fidelius charm that the professor helped set up. My own neighborhood was no safer. Hogwarts has not been the safest place for me either."

McGonagall felt shame in her heart at his words.

Harry continued. "That said, Director Bones has provided me with the means to legally protect myself. She has also provided qualified people to help protect me from harm's way. I say help, because I believe that it is every witch or wizard's personal responsibility to be able to protect themselves and their loved ones in the event of an attack. Some may argue that it's the Ministry's job to protect everyone. I believe that it's their responsibility to inform people of the situation and to help. However I believe that people should also have a responsibility to help protect themselves." Harry realized that he'd climbed on a soapbox and felt a bit embarrassed. However she had asked his opinion on a subject where nothing was completely black or white.

Satisfied that Wizarding law had been followed, Wallace stood and said, "In the matter of custody over Harry James Potter we find that Mr. Potter has the means and the ability to govern his own affairs within the wizarding world. The Family Custody Team believes that Law Enforcement Director Bones has acted responsibly and provided a complete due diligence relating to the case. We also believe that it is prudent that Mr. Potter be provided full access to all of his financial accounts and provided Auror protection for the remainder of the summer."

After the hearing, Dumbledore mindful of needing Amelia's cooperation the next day asked if he could speak with Harry, and Hermione on matters largely related to schoolwork. Delighted that he would even think to ask, she pointed him back into the conference room where Harry was talking with Remus and Hermione and her parents were talking with Minerva. Seeing him stand patiently to the side, Minerva and Remus both left so he could have his conversation. Emma sat nearby wishing that she had the old wizard in her surgery with one of her dental probes in her hand.

Dumbledore smiled at the two teens and said, "I wish the best for you as always Harry. I do not want the mistakes that I have made in the past to cloud our future together. I have prepared a list of books that the two of you may wish to read this summer, if you have the time.

They may prove more useful than simply reading ahead in your school books.”

Turning to Hermione he said, “The field for the position of Head Girl when you are in your seventh year is quite crowded and you will need every advantage that you can get. Such an honor usually is worth more to perspective employers, and you should continue to work hard. I would like to see you be awarded that honor.”

“Since you both have your magical practice licenses, there is no reason that would prevent you from learning to apparate. Perhaps Auror Hammer could be talked into giving you both some guidance if you so desire. You would be eligible to test this summer if you are ready.”

Looking back at Harry, he said, “It is unfortunate that the prospects for Miss Tonks career within the Aurors have been dimmed by means of her attempt to ask your uncle to behave in a civil manner. Fortunately Kingsley will not be sentenced to prison for looking for you, though he most likely will lose his job.”

Emma wished that she had him in the middle of an un-anesthetized root canal. ‘The nerve of that man, playing on their sympathy.’ In a loud enough voice to be heard, she said, “Professor Dumbledore, what does the illegal search of my home by Senior Auror Shacklebolt have to do with their schoolwork? Were you not advised to leave these two children alone this summer?”

Amelia was out in the lobby heard the shouting and put two and two together. “Dumbledore...Out! And those wards better be down on that home by the time I inspect it this afternoon.”

Amelia was so angry at that infernal man. In ninety minutes, she would be asking for the shield and a year’s pay from a man who, a week earlier, she had counted as her most competent Senior Auror. She understood Shacklebolt’s reasoning, but he had clearly taken advantage of his position and crossed the bright red line of what could be forgiven.

Kingsley knew that he was screwed. Not because he was of Afrikaner-Boor descent. The wizarding world in Europe was virtually colorblind. He had simply tried to be thorough as always, and had taken a shortcut to try and save time in an effort to find Harry. He bore no ill will against the Grangers, Potter, Bones, or Dumbledore. He was a man of conviction, had put his money down on a gamble and lost.

He was surprised when Dumbledore approached him before the hearing, and more surprised at his words. He had faith in the man and he had not been let down. He signed the documents that Dumbledore had produced and sat down at the table.

Dumbledore had a few words with Director Bones and the overseeing Wizengamot judges. A moment later, they each nodded and walked to the table.

Director Bones looked at the document, and gave her former officer a sad smile before countersigning his resignation. He handed her his Senior Auror shield, Ministry identification card and sat down again.

Bones spoke. "Judge Street, in the matter of Mr. Kingsley Shacklebolt entering the Granger household specifically looking for a student who had been reported missing, Mr. Shacklebolt has resigned his position as Senior Ministry Auror. The student in question has been found, and the Grangers have not pressed charges either in wizarding or the Queen's court. I am satisfied that Mr. Shacklebolt represents no threat to decent wizarding society and recommend that any additional charges be dropped. I also recommend that this be expunged from Mr. Shacklebolt's record, and that an honorable discharge from the Ministry be recorded."

Kingsley could hardly believe his ears. If Director Bones' recommendation was accepted, he would not be fined seven thousand Galleons which at this point represented his life savings.

Judge Street asked, "Professor Dumbledore, what is your interest in this particular case?"

Dumbledore stood to speak to an inferior grade Wizengamot Judge and said, "I am here in my role as Headmaster of Hogwarts, and am prepared to offer Mr. Shacklebolt a teaching position if there are no additional charges pending against him."

Kingsley was shocked. Dumbledore had really come through for him. He smiled at the man and said, "I accept."

Dumbledore said, "Good. You can start today if you wish, or next week if it would be more convenient."

Kingsley said, "Thank you, Professor." As Kingsley spoke the words, Amelia thought the same thing. 'Thanks Dumbledore.' He really had made the best of a bad situation.

Meanwhile, Harry had finished signing his papers. Hermione had received her very own vault key, and had taken her parents in the cart to visit it. While nowhere near the size of Harry's vault and numbered 2240, it was a fun cart ride to get to it. She was so pleased with herself. It was hers. None-the-less, her parents enjoyed the ride. She had withdrawn two hundred Galleons and was itching to go spend it at the bookstore.

Harry had been presented the keys to the Potter family vault and the Black family vault. He was unquestionably the wealthiest student at Hogwarts, but it mattered little to him. His thoughts were focused on the beautiful witch bouncing his way followed by her amused looking parents. They smiled as she took his hand as they found Auror Church and made their way out to the bookstore. The books that Dumbledore had suggested seemed to be NEWT level or beyond – conjuring, occlumency, invisibility, developing advanced wards, apparation, and first aid healing.

Emma smiled at her overly focused daughter and said, “Dear, there is a difference between getting a few books from a list, and getting the entire list. I don’t see Harry with an armload of books.”

Harry misinterpreted her remarks and offered to carry Hermione’s books for her.

Emma smiled at the well-meaning young man. “Thank you for helping her, Harry. I meant to say, I didn’t see you buying an armload of books to read.”

“That’s really not a fair comparison, Ma’am. I inherited a library today. I have no idea which books are in it.”

Hermione recalled that the Black library was extensive and contained at least a fourth of the volumes that were found in the restricted section of the Hogwarts library. “Oh Harry, there are thousands of volumes there, some really obscure. We should go over and look at...”

Dan said, “There are swimming lessons, tennis, bicycles and time to relax. You two really should make time to have a summer. If you want to go visit it later in the week we can.”

He continued. “I talked with Director Bones before we left. She will have a passport issued for you this week, Harry. I would ask that you two study your magic either in the morning, or the afternoon, but not both. We should try and take the time to do things as a family before school starts again. It comes up so quickly. We need to get back now. It’s been a long evening for Auror Church, and we have appointments at the surgery all afternoon.”

That afternoon, Harry discovered the pleasure that a wet, white, unlined bikini can bring to a young man. The slash that McNair’s weakened spell had hit Hermione with had all but disappeared, though she smiled as Harry searched for it for a very long time sat as she sat drying off by the edge of the pool with her feet in the water.

Harry did look closely. He knew that it was had been about two feet long beginning at he left collarbone going diagonally down ending above her right hip. Whether he started at the top and traced his way down or if he started at the bottom and traced it back up, his eyes always seemed to stop half way.

Hermione followed his eyes with silent amusement. She had never allowed anyone to look at her so closely, and Harry obviously enjoyed what he saw. She had never noticed Harry really check out any of the witches at school, and guessed that he hadn't. She was delighted that he wanted to look at her and even more-so that he was obviously fascinated with what he was seeing.

"Breathe Harry. It's OK to look, but you have to breathe. I'll demonstrate." As she took a deep breath, Harry discovered the beauty of motion.

She smiled at him as he stood in the water transfixed. "It's OK, Harry. I don't mind." She leaned over to kiss his forehead, and fell forward into the water on top of him. They laughed as they splashed each other. It had been a fun afternoon.

They got out and went back inside to get dressed. Afterwards Harry started dinner while Hermione cleaned a bit around the house. Harry made a split breast chicken dinner, baked in a pan with rice and a cream cheese sauce. In truth, it was a very good dinner. The dentists were very grateful to come home to a clean house and a delicious meal.

Emma brought a plate out to Auror Hammer. She smiled and thanked her, saying, "It looks like you're a very good cook, Dr. Granger. Thank you."

Emma smiled at her and said, "You are very welcome, Senior Auror Hammer, but it was Harry who made the dinner."

She looked stunned. "Mr. Potter conjured this? It's delicious."

Emma shook her head. "Actually, he cooked it in our kitchen. He's quite the cook."

Hammer was impressed. "He's had a hard childhood, that one. He chased off two dementors that had attacked him and his cousin last summer and nearly went to prison for defending himself."

Emma hadn't heard the details of that story. She asked, "Why?"

Hammer replied, "The Minister of Magic is a small-minded man. He said Mr. Potter had no right to defend himself because he was underage. The whole world's strange sometimes as far as how they react around Mr. Potter. Shacklebolt was dismissed from the force today for trying to find him when he went missing, another young Auror was suspended for telling his uncle to behave himself. Mr. Potter got in a jam last year for showing other kids how to properly defend themselves."

She continued. "With the possible exception of your daughter Hermione, it's like no one can see straight as far as he's concerned. It's like he's royalty in some folk's eyes. Now with you-know-who back, the whole wizarding world is looking to him again for some kind of a miracle. He's just a bloke who wants a bit of time to be a teenager and chat up a nice girl. Who can blame him?"

Emma had a different viewpoint of Shacklebolt, but didn't press the issue. Instead she asked, "What about the other Auror?" She had seen the confrontation at the train station and was interested in Hammer's viewpoint.

Hammer replied, "There's a regulation against using magic or threatening to use magic to intimidate ordinary folk like yourself. She knew about it and chose to ignore it."

"True," said Emma. "But there are also regulations against abusing children."

Hammer nodded. "I understand, Dr. Granger. I wasn't there at the train station. I never met Mr. Potter's relations. I never met Mr. Potter before a few days ago. Aurors are held to different standards than ordinary witches or wizards. No one else was punished for standing

up to that man, just Auror Tonks. She knew she shouldn't have done it. It's just the way it is."

Emma was concerned for the young woman. She asked, "Are there long-term consequences for her?"

Hammer nodded and replied, "A black mark like that on her record, particularly one relating to Mr. Potter will follow her for the rest of her career as an Auror."

Emma asked, "If Harry were to make a statement on her behalf, would that help her?"

Hammer gave a small laugh. "It would be like having your photo taken with Lady Di and signed, Dr. Granger, Best wishes and thanks for helping me. He's that popular in the wizarding world right now. Maybe you didn't know."

In truth, Emma didn't know. She assumed that she had taken in some poor friend of her daughters, not the prince of the wizarding world. She replied, "I'm sure his fame has its ups and downs. Hermione's told me that there have been some pretty awful things printed about him too."

Hammer nodded sadly saying, "She's right about that. A year ago, the paper really went off against him. I'd best get back to work, and make my rounds. Thanks for the plate. I really appreciate it."

Back at the burrow, Arthur was explaining the no confidence vote process to Molly.

Molly listened carefully then asked, "I agree that Fudge has been doing more harm than good the last year and a half, but why you Arthur? We finally are getting to the point in our lives where we have a bit of gold to spare and Professor Dumbledore asks us to risk our entire financial future to align the government closer to his viewpoint. That's asking a lot. Why doesn't he ask Amelia instead?"

Arthur had asked himself the same question, particularly after hearing from Ginny a few nights before. He replied, "Several reasons I suppose. I'm not certain that the two of them have mended fences yet and I think he is hoping that she'll endorse Amos for the head position."

Molly was not happy at the prospect. She asked, "And what about you? We take all the risk and what has he proposed for us?"

Arthur thought for a moment and replied, "Molly, maybe we should look at it from another angle for a minute. V, Voldemort is taking on supporters faster than our side possibly can. Fudge won't allow more Aurors. If Dumbledore looks to make up the difference, who is left?"

Molly looked at him with a tear in her eye.

Arthur looked at his loving companion of twenty seven years and nodded. "That's right. Our children. If we want to stand a prayer of not having this war fought by fifteen and sixteen year old children, we need to remove Fudge today. We've placed our faith in Dumbledore before; we can do it on this. I'm certain that he's already counted the votes.

Molly only wished that she was so sure.

While Molly and Arthur were steeling themselves for the job that they knew would be done, the Grangers were watching a movie, Groundhog Day together. Suddenly there was a flash and a swan size bird appeared and landed on their coffee table. It was the most beautiful creature that Dan or Emma had ever seen.

Harry watched them in amusement for a moment, before greeting the wondrous bird. "Hello Fawkes." The phoenix looked at him with its steely eyes and gave a trill. Dan shut off the DVD and continued to stare in awe at the bird.

Hermione broke the silence saying, "Fawkes is Professor Dumbledore's phoenix. Dan and Emma moved a bit closer.

Harry took the letter from the bird and surprisingly it waited. Harry explained, "He must be looking for a reply." He opened the letter and looked. It was addressed to Hermione and Harry. They opened it together.

Harry and Hermione,

While this is not strictly school business I am certain that it is of interest to you. Arthur Weasley has decided to initiate a vote of no confidence for Minister of Magic Fudge tomorrow. This is a highly unusual move, but these are highly unusual times. As you both may know, there are fifteen department and sub-department heads within the ministry. Arthur is head of one of the sub-departments – the misuse of muggle artifacts.

Any of the department or sub-department heads may initiate a petition for a vote of no confidence. A simple majority of the fifteen votes is required. If the petition is successful, a combined vote of the managers and the sixty members of the Wizengamot is taken the next day. If fifty or more votes are cast to replace, the action is passed, and the initiating author is given the privilege of nominating the successor. Since the senior undersecretary position is vacant, it is likely that Arthur would be named to fill that position if the vote is successful.

In this case Arthur would almost certainly name Amos Diggory as his choice for Minister of Magic. Given that Lucius Malfoy is currently enjoying some time in Azkaban prison, there will be much less chance of underhanded lobbying, bribes or threats.

If the petition or the vote is unsuccessful, tradition dictates that the author of the bill resigns their position. A Wizengamot judge cannot initiate the action; it has to be a manager.

If you would like to help the Weasley's in this effort, you may wish to write a well-worded letter of support that would appear in the Wednesday morning edition of the Prophet. I personally believe that the time has come to publicly take a stand against Fudge. He has refused to support the Aurors expansion plan in this time of great

need. If you would be willing to take such a public stand, please prepare your letter this evening, and let me know that you are doing so. Fawkes would be by at 8:00 AM to collect it.

I am certain that your endorsement would be enough to move a few votes and help the Weasleys. I know that they would be very appreciative of your support.

Albus, Dumbledore

Emma was watching the two teens while Dan was mesmerized by the beautiful bird. "Would it possibly let me touch it?" he asked with some hesitation.

As in answer to Dan's question, Fawkes gave a little hop and stood on the coffee table right in front of the amazed dentist and stuck out the bottom of his neck to be scratched. Harry said, "That's amazing. He allows very few people to touch him."

Back to topic, Hermione asked, "Harry, what do you think?"

Harry shook his head, saying, "I think Professor Dumbledore made the suggestion to Mr. Weasley and he's doing whatever the professor asks. What would they do if he lost his position? The professor moves people around like Ron moves his chess pieces, without considering their personal consequence. It would be nice if Mr. Weasley got a promotion, but an absolute disaster if he got sacked."

Harry put down his coke and finished, saying, "So he sends Fawkes here with a note, knowing that I'd do anything to help Mr. Weasley. They've done so much for me, I would never refuse a request to help him. I'm not saying that I think getting rid of Fudge is a bad idea. I just hate being manipulated."

Emma remembered what Hammer had mentioned, and said, "Speaking of being manipulated, Harry you may want to say something to Director Bones on Auror Tonk's behalf. Auror Hammer seems to think that her suspension will have long-term consequences for her. She may have been wrong, but she was only trying to help."

Harry felt terrible, and replied, "A lot of things got balled up that day. It never occurred to me that the wards protecting their home would come down like that."

Hermione could see that he was quickly sinking into a self-induced funk, walked up to Harry, put her arms on his shoulders, and said, "Harry, stop it. You didn't burn your uncle's home down. Death Eaters did. Tonks didn't burn their home down either. You don't blame her, so don't go blaming yourself."

Harry calmed down, thought for a minute and replied, "OK, I'll do it. How long would it have to be?"

Emma thought for a moment and said "About four to five hundred words would be best. Hermione could probably help with the wordsmithing if you'd like. Dan and I would be happy to read it over if you wish."

Fawkes made some obvious movement to be noticed. Hermione grabbed a piece of parchment and wrote, We'd be glad to help Mr. Weasley. H&H

Fawkes took the parchment in his claw, and in another fiery flash vanished.

Ten minutes later, Fawkes arrived at the burrow with a note.

Molly and Arthur,

Harry Potter has just volunteered to write an endorsement of your plan that will appear in the Wednesday editions of the Daily Prophet, and the Quibbler. That should be worth five to seven swing votes, and ensure that the vote passes easily.

Thank you for taking the lead in this action. Your words will be heard as the voice of reason.

Albus Dumbledore

Arthur thought to himself, 'I wonder how much arm bending Dumbledore did to get Harry to agree to this plan?' He knew that Harry hated publicity and had little interest in politics.

Regardless of the origin, Arthur was silently relieved that Harry had made such an offer.

Back at the Grangers, Harry thought that the Granger's home should be warded as soon as possible. He would talk with Mr. and Mrs. Granger in the morning.

A/N

Given the circumstances, what is the likelihood that Fudge would be sacked?

Would Snape allow Malfoy to attack the Granger's home?

Did the child protection panel act responsibly?

Chapter 7

Dumbledore would never be comfortable with the safety measures that Amelia was able to provide for Harry, and believed that his being at the Grangers was equivalent to Harry signing death warrants for the Grangers. He summoned Severus Snape to his office. Dispensing with the usual chit chat that others would prefer to hear, Dumbledore started in. "Severus, I have a most important and most delicate job that I'd ask you to do."

Snape was a bit surprised, at his words and replied, "How can I help you, Headmaster?"

"I need to get Harry to realize that he needs to be in a safer place than where he is currently staying."

Unless Dumbledore was asking him to launch an attack against Potter or one of his little friends, Snape had no interest. "Pardon my asking, Headmaster, but why are Potter's holiday sleeping arrangements anyone's concern?"

Dumbledore looked at Snape carefully and said, "The events from June should have made that clear. Harry is involved with Riddle through the prophecy that you heard some sixteen years ago. He has had to bear incredible burdens and deserves our support and respect."

Snape scowled. "He may have his destiny, but that does not excuse his arrogance."

Dumbledore shook his head. 'Severus would never change his opinion about Harry and would carry a grudge against James to his death.' "There is no arrogance in wearing rags to school Severus. There was no arrogance in being forced to live in a cupboard and endure years of abuse from his uncle. There was no arrogance in being ridiculed and called a liar in the newspapers and magazines for a year."

Snape hadn't heard many of these things before, but they did nothing to change his personal opinion of the brat. "What would you like me to do?"

"If you are willing, I would ask you to make an appearance in Death Eater garb at the Grangers and attempt to scare them without revealing yourself, hurting anyone, or getting caught by the single guard that Amelia has placed there."

After considering the request for a minute Snape said that he would take care of it next Saturday, and not to worry about complications.

Dumbledore was relieved that Harry had agreed to help Arthur. He knew that Harry would do almost anything to help the quirky but loveable father of seven. Dumbledore's only hesitation in having Harry endorse Arthur's plan was the increased attention placed on the boy. He would feel much better when Harry was safely back at Grimmauld place.

With Hermione's help, Harry was at last satisfied with his letter to the editor of both the Quibbler and the Prophet. While it would have been Harry's preference to send the letter only to Luna's father and help them out, Hermione pointed out that in this case time was of the essence.

Harry handed the letter to Emma to read.

An open letter to the Managers of the Ministry and the Wizengamot:

It is my opinion that Cornelius Fudge is the wrong man for the job. It was my bad luck to be at the rebirth of Voldemort on 24 June 1995. Tied to a grave marker in a Little Hangleton cemetery not too far from his father's old residence, I saw him rise out of a large cauldron. I saw him call for his Death Eaters by touching a wand to the Dark Mark that had been burned into the arm of one of his followers. As they answered Voldemort's call, I watched as he greeted them by name. Miraculously when he dueled with me, I managed to escape.

When I returned to the Hogwarts school with the body of the other student that I was with, Cedric Diggory, via the portkey that we had both been tricked into using, I reported these events to Professor Dumbledore, who reported them exactly as they happened to Minister of Magic Fudge. I gave him the names of the Death Eaters that I had personally heard Voldemort name that evening.

Minister Fudge did nothing, except call me a liar, and whine to Dumbledore that "It can't be. It just can't be." No one wanted Voldemort to come back, but he had.

A year passed before Voldemort went public. What was he doing in that time? One can only imagine that he was out gathering supporters. How much was the Ministry Auror squad allowed to grow in that time? None. My understanding is that the size of the Auror department was frozen on 4 June 1995 by direction from Minister Fudge.

Minister Fudge did nothing until the evening of 28 June 1996 when Voldemort and twelve of his Death Eaters initiated a raid at the Department of Mysteries. I was there and helped capture 11 of the 12 Death Eaters. I among others watched as Professor Dumbledore personally dueled with Voldemort. Minister Fudge came in wearing his pajamas and saw it too.

What has he done since? Has he authorized the Auror team to double in size? No. The manpower freeze is still on.

Is this the man that we believe can lead the wizarding world to victory in a time of war?

I don't think so.

Arthur Weasley is taking a risk by initiating a vote of no confidence. Others will take risks in doing their part. I believe that the time has come for change in how we fight Voldemort and his followers. Witches and wizards need to be able to defend themselves. They need the skills and in many cases the authorization to be able to perform magic. They need to know that an adequate sized group of professionals is there to assist them, not simply by defending, but attacking his Death Eaters where they stand.

A good leader would be spearheading this effort, not dragging their feet at every step. I support Arthur Weasley's effort to unseat Minister Fudge and will support the man or woman who has the courage and foresight to take the war to Voldemort.

Respectfully submitted,

Harry James Potter

Emma put the paper down and thought carefully about what the two teens had just written. She could see the places where Hermione had helped Harry with phrasing or grammar, but the letter was obviously his.

She had a hard time connecting that the young man with the unruly hair who had made such a wonderful dinner had faced that horror, and even worse, that the authorities had refused to believe him. How many people had died or would die due to the minister's inaction?

She reread the part about individuals needing the skills to be able to defend themselves.

She would talk with the two in the morning.

At eight AM on Tuesday, Fawkes arrived. Harry had made three copies of his letter. He sent two with Fawkes, having previously sent the other to Mr. Weasley with Hedwig, and on Emma's advice, had kept the original.

Arthur was heartened at the powerful message that Harry had written supporting his effort. He hoped his own letter was received as well. Running out of time before work, he asked Molly to write Harry a proper thank-you note. He looked at his letter once more before leaving for the day.

Petition to initiate a vote of no confidence 16 July 1996

It is with equal amounts of sadness and conviction that I must act to call for a vote of no confidence in our Minister of Magic, Cornelius Fudge. In my observation, he is the very worst sort of leader for a time of war. He has exhibited indecisiveness from the start, freezing budgets in the Law Enforcement group, and looking the other way when faced with obvious wrongdoings of Death Eaters employed at the Ministry.

He was swayed by the influence of Death Eater Lucius Malfoy and other Death Eaters that had been allowed back into the employ of the ministry, in some cases achieving department head status.

Due to Fudge's refusal to admit that Voldemort had returned, we have lost out opportunity to push him back before he achieved a toehold. Now we are faced with fighting a full-blown war without that aid of an Auror team that should have been a year into expansion.

Each day that passes, he is getting stronger and we are faced with the increased likelihood that we will be forced to bring our children into the war.

I believe that the time is such that we are forced to look to new leadership. As such, we the undersigned request a vote of no confidence be taken on Wednesday 17 July 1996.

Arthur Weasley – Head – Misuse of Muggle Artifacts Office

There were signature spots for the other fourteen signatures.

After Arthur left for the day, Molly took the time to write Harry a proper thank you note. She was so grateful that he had come to their aid, and recognized that his was the greatest endorsement that she and Arthur could have received. Her only regret was that he and Ginny had not found more time for each other. She looked it over one last time before sending it.

Dear Harry,

Arthur and I would like to offer you our deepest appreciation for you having taken the time to write such a wonderful letter of support for Arthur's effort. We simply believed it to be the right thing to do and pray that the effort is successful.

Time and time again you have come to our aid. We are so indebted to you and could never begin to repay you for your many brave deeds.

We can only offer our love and thanks.

Molly and Arthur

She sent the letter off, and prayed that Arthur would be successful in gathering the eight signatures needed to present to the Wizengamot for final vote. If successful, tomorrow would be another stressful day. If unsuccessful, Arthur would return home carrying a box containing his personal belongings from his office.

At breakfast, Emma asked Harry and Hermione about the home protection techniques that they had been studying. They decided to start with several rather simple charms - the imperturbable charm, the impervious charm and using runes to automatically create a flame freezing charm in the event of fire.

They also decided to see if they could place the house under an anti-disapparation ward, but knew that they would have to read up a lot more on the subject.

Dan had appointments at their surgery that morning, but Emma had the morning off. She visited with the other guardian of their home, Hit Wizard, Michael Wood. He knew Harry on more of a personal basis than the others as he had come to several of the Quidditch games in years past to watch his younger brother Oliver. As such, he was less in awe of Harry, and more respectful of the person.

When Hermione and Harry had finished, Wood looked at the work that they had done to the home and gave his approval.

He told Emma, "The advantage in the flame freezing charm is that few if any Death Eaters would ever notice that it was there. As such, they would spend many minutes attempting to light the house on fire with no real damage being done to the structure."

Emma nodded at his words, hoping that she would never find out just how good her daughter's work had really been.

The variation on the impervious charm that they used would act much like a shield charm and harden the home against a reducto blast or similar impact spells. Like the flame freezing charm, the intent was to slow down the effects of a potential attack, hoping to stall any serious damage until help could arrive.

By 10 AM, Arthur had acquired seven signatures and still had five more managers to talk with. He met with Holly Bruce, the new manager of Magical Games and sports. After five minutes, she signed the paper.

In the end, twelve of the fifteen managers signed the document. Arthur brought the document to Dumbledore who was in his Wizengamot office for the day.

Dumbledore had the paperwork already prepared and made the arrangements to send out the official notifications to the other judges and the managers. The vote would be taken at 10 AM. Arthur would have the opportunity to speak.

Dumbledore believed that once Fudge found out that the petition had successfully been drafted and approved, he would quickly tally up the likely votes and either prepare his rebuttal speech, or prepare a letter of resignation.

Dumbledore told Arthur that he believed the Wizengamot would currently vote 42 for his proposal with 8 voting against and 10 swing votes. With the 12 votes from the managers the vote would probably be 54 for dismissal 11 against and 10 swing votes. With Harry's

published endorsement, Dumbledore believed the final vote would be 62 for and 13 against Fudge.

Fudge was livid when he found out that a petition had been circulated, and outraged when he found the vote to be held the next day. He didn't want to go down in an embarrassing vote, but believed that he possessed a much higher degree of support than Dumbledore had estimated. He estimated that he had as many as 30 votes in the Wizengamot along with the 3 from the managers, leaving a failed vote of 42 – 33, or 8 votes short of the required 50 votes.

Fudge thought about possible replacements for that muggle-loving Arthur Weasley. 'Perhaps Weatherbee should be rewarded with a promotion'.

Amelia Bones was surprised, but delighted when Arthur had come to her office with a no confidence petition with five signatures already on it. He had carefully considered (or had been coached) in selecting the order. The names read Weasley, Diggory, Hopkirk, Goshawk, and Croaker. She was happy to add her name as the sixth. They talked for a minute and Arthur left.

She called her senior Aurors to come for a short meeting. Everyone was there except Wood who was taking the shift at the Grangers. She advised them that most likely there would be a No Confidence vote taken tomorrow morning. Depending on the outcome, either Fudge or Weasley would be escorted out of the building in disgrace.

The Aurors and Hit Wizards as a group had little reason to endorse Fudge as a leader. Most of the Aurors had believed Dumbledore and Potter from the start, and realized that Fudge had done more to endanger their lives in the last year than Voldemort's ever growing band of Death Eaters.

Snape arrived at the Malfoy manor after visiting with Dumbledore. He met with Malfoy and asked him to be ready at 11 PM on Friday evening.

Malfoy asked what Snape had in mind, but he refused to give the details. Snape would have a portkey available as the location would not be disclosed.

Refusing the opportunity to stay for dinner, Snape left to consider his plan. He wanted to eliminate as many of the risks as he could.

At noon on Tuesday Arthur presented a petition to Dumbledore containing twelve signatures. Dumbledore countersigned the document and made several copies. He gave one back to Arthur, shook his hand and wished him well for the next day.

One went to Fudge, along with the official notification of the hearing and vote the next morning. He kept one for himself and sent the other with Fawkes.

Each of the Wizengamot judges were notified of the vote, as were the managers. By most estimates it would be a very close vote.

Harry and Emma were in the back garden having a lemonade. Hermione was walking out the door carrying the pitcher and some ice when the beautiful phoenix appeared.

Harry took the letter from Fawkes, stroked him once, and the magnificent bird vanished in a flash of flame.

"What did you get," inquired Emma.

"Dunno," replied Harry. "But the professor wanted us to know something." Harry opened the letter and handed it to Hermione and Emma.

Hermione smiled at him, and gave him a little hug. "Harry, this is very good. Mr. Weasley needed to collect eight signatures and got twelve. With the help of your letter in the papers tomorrow, the vote looks like it will pass."

"I hope so," replied Harry. "A lot of things could go wrong."

Dinner at the Weasley household that night was quite loud. All of the children (except Percy) were there. Arthur had told everyone what he had done. Bill, Charlie and the twins were amazed that their father had taken such a political stand.

Ginny was amazed that her father had been so manipulated to risk his entire career at the Ministry to serve as a piece in one of the professor's human chess games.

Molly didn't say much, but felt much the same as her daughter. Her Arthur had risked so very much on Dumbledore's suggestion. It wasn't until she passed around the letter that Harry had written for Wednesday's editions that the family united in their hope and prayer for a successful conclusion of the vote tomorrow.

A/Ns

If Snape is discovered, would Dumbledore stand up for him, or leave him hanging?

Many people have suggested that Bones would be a better MoM. Would her Canon record justify such support?

UdderPD has started a great new fic #2310491. I thought it has a fantastic start.

Thanks for reviewing.

O-C

Chapter 8

Arthur woke early on Wednesday morning. In reality, he had hardly slept. After making a cup of coffee, the owl carrying the newspaper arrived. He looked at the front page and could hardly believe his eyes.

Harry Potter Blasts Fudge's Record

Story by Rita Skeeter

In a move that was hoped for by many, Harry James Potter came out with his strongest words yet against Minister of Magic Cornelius Fudge. A follow-up vote of no confidence petition was circulated yesterday and overwhelmingly passed, setting up a formal vote of No Confidence today. In what is expected to be Fudge's last afternoon on the job, Fudge had no comment other than to defend his record in providing thirteen years of relative peace within the wizarding world.

Estimates of the vote range from 45 for dismissal 30 against to as high as 70 – 5 with 50 of 75 votes required to dismiss the embattled MoM. Most sources expect that Fudge will tender his resignation this morning rather than face the indignation of forcibly being removed from office.

More on Harry Potter including the full text – page 3

Likely candidates and their chances – page 5

The No Confidence procedure – page 13

Arthur was mentioned by name several times on page 13. As he was reading the paper, he felt that Dumbledore may have underestimated Harry's impact. With luck, Fudge will have submitted his resignation before the hearing even began at 10 AM

Molly read the articles along with her best friend and prayed that it would all be over by the time that her Arthur left the house. She silently reminded herself never to criticize Harry for anything, ever again. He had truly come through for them.

In Crawley, Harry and the Grangers read the paper in stunned silence. Usually letters to the editor were relegated to the back of a paper, tucked in somewhere between the obituaries and the positions available listings. None of them had seen anything like this before.

“Sort of makes you wonder if you could do the same thing with any of the other politicians,” quipped Dan.

“Dunno,” replied Harry. “I don’t have that much interest in politics. Fudge has mostly gone off against me in the past. Payback was OK. I just hope this whole thing passes so Mr. Weasley doesn’t lose his job.”

“I don’t think things will get that far,” replied Emma. “Most politicians don’t like to go down in the flames of a No Confidence vote. My guess is that he’s writing his resignation letter as we speak.”

Meanwhile at Hogwarts, the normally pleasant breakfast conversation was anything but. “Dumbledore, how could you?” shouted McGonagall. She had never been so angry at Dumbledore. “Harry would never have written that letter on his own, unprodded. What did you do or say to make him do such a thing?”

Eyes twinkling, the old wizard replied, “Calm down, Minerva. I did not coerce Harry into such action. I simply let him know that Arthur had begun the No Confidence petition and pointed out that he might appreciate a vote of support from him. Harry authored the letter on his own and of his own free will.”

“Bullocks, Dumbledore. I’ve seen his papers for the last five years. That doesn’t even resemble his writing style. It looks more like something that Miss...” She was so mad that she got up from the table. ‘Of course. Dumbledore must have suggested that Hermione look it over first. Didn’t Harry have enough on his plate without being thrust into politics at the same time?’

As Fudge's last official act, he fired Weatherbee. "No one likes a brown-noser who's never had an original thought, Wetherbee. Maybe you should take a position as a busker outside a gentlemen's club."

By 8:05 AM both men had left the building. By 8:20 Arthur and Dumbledore had both been notified of Fudge's resignation.

Dumbledore thought to himself, 'This was far easier than I had thought.' He wondered if he shouldn't have tried it earlier. He was confident that Arthur would carry out the remainder of his plan flawlessly. By noon Diggory would be sworn in as the new MoM.

According to custom, Arthur had the first shot at nominating the successor. As that person only required a simple majority to be elected, Arthur had a good chance at naming the next Minister of Magic.

Taking an unexpected detour in the way to work, he apparated to the back garden of the Granger home, greeted Senior Auror Church and knocked on the back door. Cautiously, Dan answered the door. Arthur said, "Hello Dr. Granger. May I come in and speak with Harry for a moment? I'd like to thank him properly for his help."

Dan met his eyes, decided that he was sincere and stood aside. "Of course. Come in. Please, it's Dan."

"Thank you. It's Arthur." They walked into the kitchen where Emma, Hermione and Harry were having coffee. Arthur looked at Harry and Hermione, smiled and shook their hands. "Thank you Harry. Your letter saved a vote. Fudge resigned early this morning."

"That's great news, Mr. Weasley," said Hermione, hugging Harry. She invited him to have a cuppa, and visit for a few minutes.

Having asked his questions, and hearing the answers, Weasley left ten minutes later.

Amelia had arrived at her office at 6:00 that morning. After reading the paper, she was not surprised to hear that Fudge had resigned so quickly. There was no pressing business for the next two hours. She notified the Aurors that the visitors' entrances were to be watched with extra caution that morning.

She believed that Dumbledore had masterminded Arthur's work yesterday, and expected that through Weasley, Diggory would be nominated, seconded and voted in by 10:30 that morning.

It occurred to her that she might be nominated in the unlikely event that Amos was not voted in. It was her expectation that whoever Arthur nominated, would likely receive at least 55 votes.

By 8:20, Amos Diggory had been notified that Fudge had tendered his resignation. According to Dumbledore's plan he would become the next Minister of Magic within three hours. He began rehearsing his acceptance speech.

Diggory made a note to himself that he should invite Potter to the inaugural ball. Even though he had caused a stir lately within the Order with his living arrangements, Amos knew that Potter's heart was in the right place, and he obviously had the ear of the press right now.

After Arthur left, Dan had offered to take Harry to the club for a game of golf. Hermione and Emma happily begged off, deciding that they would do a bit of shopping instead.

Harry had never played golf, but had seen it on the telly a few times. Dan loved it and was willing to be a great coach. He was grateful for a willing partner to play with, as Emma and Hermione really didn't care for the game.

The two men walked into the pro shop, where the pro greeted Dan warmly. “Good morning Dr. Granger. Who’s your latest victim?”

The three of them smiled and laughed. Dan said, “Phil, this is a good friend of my daughter, Harry Potter.”

Phil shook Harry’s hand and greeted him warmly.

Dan told the pro that Harry would need a set of everything for the day. They spent a half hour on the driving range covering proper stance, swing basics and a good grip. Unlike most teens, Harry wasn’t obsessed with the idea of distance, and could consistently hit his long irons where he was trying to place the ball. They went over to the putting green and covered the basics of a chip then practiced putting a bit. Dan was amazed how quickly Harry seemed to have picked up the basics.

They had a fun time at it, and visited with each other along the way as they played. Dan asked Harry about Fudge.

“He gets involved in little things, and chooses to ignore the big unpleasant things. There must be someone who’s better qualified to help people protect themselves.”

Dan nodded, hoping Harry would continue. “We watched that movie the other night about those old time American Gangsters in Chicago. Wizarding fights seem like that. They’re not set place army battles, more like shootouts and murders. They’re usually over within seconds.”

Harry continued. “When we practiced dueling and stuff in school, we did these ridiculous spells – tickling spells, or a jelly legs jinx. The problem was that it gave the impression that if you get hit, a time out would make it OK again. When we were facing those twelve Death Eaters last month, they were playing for keeps. That guy who hit Hermione was trying to slice her in half. He was wounded at the time, and couldn’t get his spell right, but he thought nothing of her life.”

Walking to the eighth tee Harry said, “They’re bad people, and I get really angry that the ministry hasn’t done more to protect regular

families. None of my other friends have a 24-hour guard at their house. Fudge hasn't seen fit to even send out a basic self-defense pamphlet. Does that make any sense?"

"No," replied Dan shaking his head in sad realization that his playing partner was spot on. "Not a bit. What else can we do to protect ourselves?"

"A lot of things, I suppose. Yard lights, armor vests, more guards, having a shotgun in the house. Maybe carrying a portkey around is a better answer."

Dan nodded as he teed the ball. "Family is everything, Harry. Houses can always be replaced. You're family, Harry. I know about shotguns, but how could we get a portkey?"

"Director Bones could help us there."

As they were walking to the eighteenth tee, Dan asked, "How are things going with you and Hermione?"

Without hesitation, Harry replied, "She means everything to me, sir. She's my best friend."

Dan nodded and smiled. "I know what you mean Harry. Emma's my best friend."

Harry, teed the ball and hit off using his 2 iron. The ball went straight and stopped about 140 yards out.

"Nice shot Harry. It's a lot more fun playing from the fairway 140 yards out than from behind a tree 200 yards out."

They finished their game, had a pint in the clubhouse and went home. As they were getting out of the car, Dan said, "Thanks for the game, Harry. I enjoyed it."

"Thank you sir. I did too. Actually I had a lot of fun. Thanks again."

"My pleasure. It looks like the girls are in the back garden."

While Dan and Harry had been coercing little white balls to fall into holes, Emma and Hermione had been shopping. Emma asked, "Are you having a good holiday, Hermione?"

Without hesitation Hermione replied, "The best, mum. Thanks for offering Harry a place to stay. I really like him."

Emma smiled at her daughter, amazed how easily those words had sprung from her mouth. "So do we, dear. He's a very nice young man. You have good taste in men."

Hermione smiled at her mum, not really blushing, but happy at Emma's endorsement at the unspoken words.

They had a nice lunch together. The women had bought new tops and had picked out new shorts for Dan and Harry. They listened politely as Dan gave them a hole-by-hole account of the morning; each silently delighted that they had hadn't been dragged out to play. Surprising both women, Harry seemed to have genuinely had a good time. He and Dan seemed to enjoy each other's company quite a bit.

After lunch, Dan and Emma went to their surgery where they each had appointments until 5:00.

Auror Hammer was grateful that the Grangers had been so inclusive. They always made an extra lunch or dinner and spent time visiting. Hammer enjoyed the assignment. There was no mountain of paperwork to fill out, and the young witch and Mr. Potter were very easy to get along with. Sometimes they visited, and she told them stories of working with Moody, or tracking down various Death Eaters. Unlike Auror Church, Hammer had fought her share of Death Eater fights and knew that the fights could be brutally swift.

After a while she let the teens be, while she looked around, checking the wards. She told them that she would talk more with them after dinner.

Hermione asked Harry if he wanted to go for a swim. The smile on Harry's face made Hermione feel good about herself. She had never really thought of herself as pretty before this summer. She knew that Harry thought the world of her and liked everything about her, even if he was less adept at expressing it than a young woman might like.

They put on their swimsuits and floated side by side, tentatively touching hands together or taking turns dunking each other. They hadn't really talked about their evolving relationship, though each was aware that it was growing.

At 3:00, Tonks came by, carrying a very large sack of mail. She was dressed in faded jeans and a form fitting top.

"Hi Tonks," said Hermione, smiling at her.

Watching their reactions closely, she greeted them. "Wotcher, Hermione? Looking good. Hi Harry."

Hermione continued smiling. "Hi Tonks. How are you?"

"I'm fine. Much better, thanks. I wanted to thank you for standing up for me with Minister Bones. That was good of you, and I really appreciate it."

Harry was momentarily confused. "Did you say Minister Bones? Does that mean?"

"Yup. Arthur gave a fifteen-minute nominating speech and the vote was 62-13. The only people who looked surprised were the professor and Amos Diggory."

"That's brilliant," said Hermione. She knew Amelia to be very fair, and it was good for any muggleborn witch to be on a first name basis with the Minister of Magic. Looking at the sack that Tonks had lugged in, Hermione inquired, "What's that?"

"Fan mail for Harry." She gave him a sly smile. "Mostly from witches, by the looks of the envelopes. We scanned them for jinxes, and curses. Hestia tossed out a couple of howlers." Hermione was

stunned at the volume of mail that was in the bag. She estimated that there were well over a thousand letters in the canvas sack.

Tonks smiled at both of them and said, "Speaking for myself, Harry and Hermione, I think you both did a great thing. I know that you don't want to make a big deal of your fame Harry, but it's there and you put it to good use this week. I need to go now, but thanks."

"Tonks, wait," said Harry. "Can you stay for a coke or a lemonade?"

"Are you sure" replied Tonks, thinking that the two were still really mad at her.

"Please?" asked Hermione. She wasn't mad at the young Auror, if Harry wasn't.

"I have time. My shift is over. Are you sure?"

"No worries," said Harry, pouring her a glass of iced lemonade.

Tonks had volunteered to drop his letters off with the hope of properly apologizing to Harry, and this looked like her chance. "Thanks. Harry," she said taking the glass. "I want to say a few things. Just let me finish. First, I'm sorry that I left your uncle's home to go tell Dumbledore that the wards had come down. That wasn't the best way to handle that, though my being there wouldn't have stopped the Death Eaters from coming."

She looked both of them in the eye and said, "I'm sorry for coming here last week and acting like a storm-trooper. It wasn't my right to do so, and I apologize. If the professor has issues with where you're spending your time, he should be taking them up with you himself, and not place other people in the middle."

Harry knew she was sincere and didn't need to hear any more. He looked into her crystal blue eyes and said, "There nothing else that needs to be said, Tonks. All is forgiven, and all is forgotten. I didn't want you to get into any trouble with Director Bones, er, I mean Minister Bones."

She knew that he meant what he'd said. He was a great guy. "Thanks, Harry. Thanks Hermione. I really appreciate it. By the way, the summer seems to really agree with both of you. You both look great. Harry did you grow since I saw you last?"

"Dunno, but I like swimming, now that I know how a bit."

"Would you care to join us?" asked Hermione. "I've got plenty of extra suits."

Tonks really wanted to, but the Professor had insisted that she return back to Grimmauld place after her visit.

"It's a really nice afternoon," coaxed Harry.

"OK." She could always rationalize that she was trying to see how they were.

"Great," smiled Hermione. "We'll be right back, Harry."

Tonks spent an hour swimming with Harry and Hermione. She was a good swimmer, and the two women took turns sneaking up behind Harry and tickling him. Reaching around to defend himself against Hermione's merciless efforts, Harry suddenly froze as surely as if someone had placed the full body bind on him. He had accidentally grabbed something that he definitely didn't have permission to.

"S,sorry," he stammered, as Tonks who had seen the whole thing was biting her lip to keep from laughing, until she saw the impact that it had made on Harry.

Hermione, gave her best friend a warm hug, and whispered, "I didn't mind, Harry. Please don't feel bad. You didn't do anything wrong." She knew that in spite of a few good days, he was emotionally still a very fragile young man, and had definitely not groped her on purpose. She knew that it wasn't in his nature to put any moves on anyone unless asked and guided.

Tonks could see that this would require more than a simple excuse me - no worries exchange between the two. She got out of the pool

and sat by the edge to watch. Harry was such a bundle of contrasts. He might be the most resourceful fighter that she'd ever seen, but could be brought to tears by the thought of offending the young woman who so obviously cared deeply for him.

'Gods,' she thought. 'He could feel up 80 percent of the witches in his class if he wanted, and they would be delighted to accommodate him. But he never would. He's such a gentleman.'

Hermione took Harry's hands and placed them around her waist, gave him a gentle kiss on the forehead, and whispered, "Everything's all right. Let's go get some lemonade."

Standing off to the side, Tonks, thought, 'Heaven help anyone who ever tried to hurt her in his presence.'

Hermione invited Tonks to stay for dinner, but the young Auror felt the need to get back to her other duties. She thanked them and left after getting dressed.

Dumbledore was not a happy man. His carefully laid plans with Amos had been dashed. Last night at this time he's been certain that Harry's letter and a good speech from Arthur would ensure a close, but favorable vote. It had not occurred to him that the Prophet would turn Harry's letter into an entire issue, causing Cornelius to resign without a fight. Perhaps he was relieved to be free of the burden that had obviously weighed him down so much the past few years.

Nonetheless, Arthur had gone against his carefully orchestrated instructions and nominated Bones to the top job. While he believed her to be a very capable Director he knew that he would have much less influence on her than Diggory. As demonstrated clearly in the last weeks, they had their differences of opinion. He was a big picture person, while she was concerned much more with individual rights and comforts. She never would have found a place for a man like Severus, even if his teaching methods were less than pleasant. She didn't care for the use of spies and would never have seen his real value.

She could be conformed later. He thought it unfortunate timing that Kingsley had been forcibly evicted from the Auror group. He would have made a very capable head for the law enforcement group. It would be interesting to see who Amelia appointed.

Tonks was over an hour late reporting in. She probably had spent the time visiting with the Senior Auror on duty at the Granger residence.

A few minutes later, she opened the back door and let herself in. Dumbledore saw her and gave her a friendly greeting. "Good afternoon, Miss Tonks. I trust your delivery was uneventful."

"Hello Professor. Everything went well. I mended some fences with Hermione and Harry, and visited with them for an hour. They invited me to go swimming with them."

Dumbledore was surprised at her response, assuming that Harry was equally mad at everyone. "Really? That is indeed good news. Did you take the opportunity to impress on Harry that he needs to leave there and move to a place of safety?"

'Gods,' thought Tonks. 'That man is a broken record.' She replied, "No Sir. I thanked Harry for taking the time to keep my career on track with my department, and watched Hermione take the time to make Harry feel good about himself." 'Has the man ever heard of empathy?'

Dumbledore knew that she was not seeing the big picture and replied, "Of course. Very well."

Draco was livid when he saw the paper and heard the news of Bones being voted in as Minister of Magic. Father had said she had no ear for their cause, and she had failed to be sympathetic when his solicitor had carefully explained that Lucius and McNair were both under the Imperious Curse at the time of the arrests.

‘Potter and his letters.’ He couldn’t believe that the Prophet had made such a big deal of one letter. ‘Father’d had many of the Wizengamot judges over to the manor for dinner or meetings.’ He was sure that they’d been paid for their loyalty. ‘That coward Fudge had left office without even putting up a good fight. It was all Potter’s fault. I’ll make him pay for the things he’d done.’

Draco hoped that Snape had something useful for him to do Friday night. He’d show them that he was ready to torch the muggle world.

Dan and Emma drove home from their surgery at 5:30. They’d only scheduled a dozen patients each that afternoon, though they both had full a day Thursday and Friday morning.

Harry had made a simple stew for dinner. It smelled delicious as Emma and Dan walked in the door. He had brightened each of their lives so much by being there. They sat on the patio table outside and invited Auror Hammer over to join them.

Hermione told them that Tonks had come over and told them that Fudge had resigned. She recapped the conversation. “Then Auror Tonks told us that Mr. Weasley had nominated Director Bones as Minister and she was elected 62 to 13.”

“That’s seems like a pretty wide margin. I like her,” said Emma. “I’m glad that she was elected. She seems like a very fair and capable manager.”

“She is at that,” replied Hammer. “She put up with a lot of guff over the years to rise through the ranks as she did. She never lost sight of people’s rights. She was one of the few who protested that Black should have been given a decent trial, but Director Crouch wouldn’t hear of it. I thought him guilty at the time, like most people did, but he should have at least gotten a hearing to say his side o things.”

Hermione had sat next to her mum and listened as they talked back and forth. Fudge’s leaving office was good and she was also glad that Madam Bones had been elected, but her primary concern was for her

friend. She'd find the opportunity to snog with Harry and get him comfortable with her. If Tonks hadn't been there, she'd have taken his hands and put them back where he so obviously wanted them to be.

It was raining all of Thursday. Wood was the day guard, and insisted on spending the day outside lurking in the bushes, watching for movement, like a bird of prey.

The four of them had gone through most of the letters last evening. Three fourths of them were from witches of various ages telling him that they thought he was a hero. A disturbing number of them had included highly inappropriate photos that left no doubt of their intentions. Neither Harry nor Hermione mentioned that they recognized some of the younger witches as current or recent classmates. Dan quipped that they didn't get any thank you letters and photos like that at the surgery, especially photos where the subjects moved. Emma smacked him on the back of the head and told him to throw them away.

Several dozen letters were from members of the DA, thanking him for speaking out. Most also thanked him for helping them learn some real defense last year. Those that had been in either the fifth or seventh year also thanked him for helping them do so well on their exams.

Harry seemed introspective and they both read together in comfortable silence. He still wasn't completely comfortable with what had happened yesterday and didn't know how to express the disappointment that he felt in himself to Hermione. He hadn't tried to grope her, and knew that she was just letting him off easy. He would find a way to make things up with her.

Molly was beside herself with relief that things had gone so smoothly for them. She was so very grateful to Harry. Ron had blown up over the fuss that had been made about a simple letter, not considering how badly things could have gone for their family. Ginny had seen the

situation for what it really was. Like her mother, she was glad that the immediate risk had passed.

Ginny was worried about the increased attention that it had drawn to Harry. She was waiting to see what the secondary and further reaching effects would be.

Amelia sat in her new office. She had four positions that needed filling on Monday. She would be sworn in on Saturday at noon. The positions of Senior Undersecretary, personal assistant, and her current position, Magical Law Enforcement Director were vacant and needed to be filled within the week. Within the MLE group, there was a Senior Auror position open from Kingsley, which the new Director would need to fill.

By tradition, the person who nominated her would receive the highest unfilled vacancy, which was arguably her own position. She did not want to place a Dumbledore puppet in that position, and wanted to fill it from within the Auror ranks.

From what she knew of the Arthur, he was an excellent administrator, who had a love of muggle gadgets and was overly swayed by Dumbledore. The wizarding world could hardly keep ignoring technology for the next twenty years. The wizarding population was quaint enough as it was. She would place him in the Undersecretary position that Umbridge had held, and focus him on developing strategies of integrating relevant technologies into the wizarding world. Emails and cellular telephones seemed much more efficient than owls. He would probably be delighted with the work, and develop a useful strategy with coaching.

Her old position could readily be filled by Kingsley, Hammer, Church, or Wood. Kingsley was in a good position where he was going. Wood would be miffed that he didn't get the job, Church wouldn't expect it, and Hammer wouldn't care one way or the other. Hammer was the better leader of the Senior Aurors. Hit Wizards were their own breed. They honed fighting skills almost exclusively and normally held their jobs until they faced an opponent who had better skills.

She would offer the position to Hammer and ask Wood to help train the flood of Auror Trainees that would be needed to ensure people's safety. She would fund the expanded group by severely fining the convicted Death Eaters, something Fudge should have done if he hadn't been swayed so deeply by Malfoy.

With respect to Dumbledore's militia, it had arguably done its job in watching for threats when the MoM refused to. In her opinion, the best thing Dumbledore could do would be to properly prepare the children to survive and thrive in a rapidly changing world. He didn't need to hold the hypothetical mantle of Minister of National defense as well.

Members of the Board of School Governors were appointed by the MoM. There currently were two open positions due to Death Eater captures. She would fill those next week. Arguably Remus Lupin would be well qualified, and as it wasn't a full time position could be scheduled accordingly. She would have to present a few needless discrimination laws to the Wizengamot for repeal first. She wished that Hermione Granger were a few years older. Rather than fill the spots with Ministry employees, she would go to the outside and try and bring in new ideas. She wanted people who would challenge Dumbledore or his successor in a positive way, not be in awe of him.

Friday morning an owl arrived at the Granger back window. Church gave a look at it, recognized the seal, and took the letter inside. The Dentists were getting ready to leave for the day, but were curious. Naturally it was addressed to Harry.

Dear Mr. Potter

You and a guest are invited to the Inauguration Ball to be held Saturday evening at 7:00 PM to midnight at the Minister's private residence. A Portkey has been provided for your use.

Dress is formal.

Hoping to meet you at last,

Mallda Hopkirk

Improper Use of Magic Office

Harry showed the letter to Dan and Emma who were considerably more interested in it than he was. "I can be back at noon, and take you two to get something to wear if you like."

Hermione knew that her mum was a half a dozen steps ahead of her friend. In a soft voice she said, "Harry, I'd be honored to go with you, if you wanted to go, and you wanted to bring me as your guest. It might be fun, and we wouldn't have to stay longer than you want."

Harry was obviously hesitating, but she wasn't sure of the reason. "What's the matter?"

Harry hesitated and replied, "I don't like the attention of a big party."

Emma said, "Harry I don't think that this is a very large gathering, probably not many more than a hundred invitations were sent out. There won't be a bunch of reporters. It's being held at Amelia's private residence. You brought down a government with five hundred words. I'm sure that she invited you because she wanted you to be there with her."

Harry was squirming in his seat. "I don't have proper robes that fit. We won't know anybody. I don't know how to dance."

She smiled at him. 'The real reason comes out at last.' In an upbeat voice she replied "Dan and I are no experts, but we will give you two a dance lesson this evening. Would that be OK?"

Harry looked at Hermione, who nodded encouragingly. "OK. I'll ask Senior Auror Hammer to take us to Diagon Alley this afternoon. I need to sign a few things at Gringotts, and we can each get something to wear. Hermione and I also need to get a few books. I thought we could barbeque tonight for dinner, and we can have a lesson after."

Emma smiled. "I'll be home at noon. We can leave right after."

McGonagall was livid. "Dumbledore rip that letter up, and don't even think of sending another. Assuming that they were invited, you have no right in the world to tell them not to go. If you're so worried about their protection, you should show up yourself and keep your eyes open. I'll go with you as your guest to keep an eye on you." She felt like batting him on the back of his head.

A/N

How good of a wizard is Draco? A windbag, or does he have the skills to back up his words?

Does it seem reasonable that the Ministry make a move to adopt technology?

How inbred is the Ministry? Should Bones look outside the Ministry for new talent?

Chapter 9

Emma arrived back at noon. Hermione had just finished making a pitcher of lemonade. Harry had made sandwiches and crisps. Auror Hammer ate outside with them. They talked about the inauguration party. She was quite pleased that Harry had also received an invitation saying, "It's really an intimate setting, not like the one that pompous arse Fudge insisted on. There were a hundred invitations sent out. I was amazed that I got one myself. I thought I'd have to work at it instead. Most of em probably went out to the fancy folk."

After lunch, Emma drove them to Diagon Alley. She got her wish at Gringotts. Harry visited Ragnot for a few minutes signing documents, and offered to take them to Harry's vault to get another document. It hadn't occurred to Harry that it had been years since the head goblin at Gringotts had personally taken a customer to the vaults in a cart. On the way down, they stopped for a moment and Emma's eyes grew in wonderment. One of the herders was moving one of the dragons. She gasped audibly. It was huge, at least twenty feet long. Ragnot told her that it was a young dragon that had just come in as a trainee.

Harry was fairly certain that their meeting a dragon hadn't been a coincidence. When they got back in the lobby, he thanked Ragnot for his personal help. The old goblin gave a slight bow and a look that passed for a goblin smile. "My pleasure, Mr. Potter. Enjoy your day."

On the walk to Malkin's, Emma could talk of nothing else. Hermione winked at Harry, and whispered "thanks." Harry and Hermione were both measured for robes. After Harry was done being measured, it was Hermione's turn. Emma showed him some different fabrics as Madam Malkin herself watched. She suggested a slate grey fabric with a silver trim. For Hermione, she found an ice blue fabric that looked fantastic. She asked for an hour to finish. She found matching shoes and a handbag for her.

Harry paid for the robes and asked about armor vests. They weren't Malkin's specialty and she recommended that they go to Redstone's several doors down. Emma was spellbound as they entered the shop. The different hides and the photos of the dragons had taken her breath away. It was one thing to hear about them and certainly

something else to have previously seen a photo. However today she had actually seen a real dragon and felt the thick armor hide with her own hand. Harry quietly found the owner and explained what he wanted. Diane the tailor told him that she'd have them ready to pick up or delivery Monday morning. Harry signed a draft, collected Hermione and Emma from the displays and they left to go pick up the dress robes.

Madam Malkin wished them both well as they left the shop carrying their purchases. On the way out Harry purchased a case of butterbeers from Tom. He thought they would make an interesting change from cokes.

Few people had recognized Harry as he had been walking down Diagon Alley. He had filled out somewhat in the last month and his new clothing fit him very well. He had worn a red cap with a football team logo and had worn the prescription sunglasses that Emma had found for him. As such he hadn't been mobbed, and they'd had a very pleasant afternoon. Hammer had taken a few minutes while they were in Malkin's to do a bit of shopping of her own. They all met up by Emma's gray BMW and drove home.

They stopped at the market on the way home and Emma bought some steaks and vegetables for dinner that evening. They got back at 4:00. Harry asked Emma what time she wanted dinner. She replied 6:30. Emma suggested that they go relax for an hour and reminded them that they would both be receiving a crash course in ballroom dancing after dinner.

As it had been raining quite a bit the day before, Emma had some trouble getting the barbeque pit fire going properly. Smiling, Hermione withdrew her wand from her wrist holder and said "Incendio."

Within a few seconds the coals had a nice chalky white ash around the edges. "Good trick, dear," smiled Emma.

"Magic," replied her smiling daughter, borrowing her friend's favorite reply.

Dan arrived home a few minutes later. Harry brought out four bottles of cold butterbeer. "What's this?" he asked.

"A wizarding drink, butterbeer. I hope you like it," said Harry.

Dan tasted it, and smiled, saying, "Excellent. This is really good."

"Guess what I saw today," said Emma entirely unable to contain herself a moment longer.

"No idea," replied Dan.

"We saw a real dragon today. It was huge. It blew fire and had a long tail and wings! It looked fantastically mean and beautiful all at the same time." She was so pleased with herself.

"We should introduce you to our friend Hagrid," said Hermione, shaking her head in disbelief at her mum. "He raised one from an egg."

"Brilliant!" said Emma, amazed. "What kind?"

Harry grinned at her and replied, "A Norwegian Ridgeback. He called it Norbert."

"Fantastic," replied Emma.

"Fantastic?" said Hermione in disbelief. "Mum, it almost bit Ron's hand off, and Hagrid lives in a wooden house! He had to get rid of it. They're illegal under wizarding law to keep as pets."

"What about the one we saw today?" asked Emma, confused.

"Gringotts is run by Goblins, not wizards," replied Harry. Dan and Harry went over to the pit, and watched the steaks burn while Emma and Hermione finished up inside.

They had a nice dinner together, along with Hammer, who thanked them for including her. As Harry and Hermione were bringing in the glasses and plates, Emma asked the Senior Auror about the type of

music that they would likely have at the ball. Hammer gave her some ideas and went back to her post.

While Dan and Emma were going over the basics of a box step and wincing while getting their feet stepped on, Draco Malfoy was down in the sub-cellar of the Malfoy manor casting unforgivables on a practice dummy that Lucius had previously set up in the training room. It was warded so the signature of the spells was muffled, and not traceable.

Draco wasn't a particularly skilled wizard. Excepting the Os that Snape invariably gave him in class, he was at best an average student who had seldom applied himself with his studies. He'd consistently been bested not only by Hermione, but most of the Ravenclaws, half of the Gryffindors, some of the Hufflepuffs, and a surprising number of the female Slytherins. In truth, he had spent his childhood living the role of the son of a baron, and acted every bit the pampered prince that Snape had accused Harry of being.

Draco was ready to prove that he could pull the trigger. Lucius had never spent much time discussing fighting strategy or technique with Draco. Believing that he lacked both discipline to be a good follower, and the vision to be a leader, Lucius let him be, hoping that Draco would attain some maturity with age.

Draco didn't know what mission Professor Snape was going to take him on, but he was positive that he would take his first life tonight. For that, he was ready.

That night at 11 Snape apparated to the front lawn of Malfoy Manor. He walked the hundred yards to get to the main house and was shown in without knocking. He drew a diagram of the Granger home, and the yard, explaining that they would be apparating to the opposite side of where Snape thought the guard was likely to be.

Snape would stun the guard, and they would ignite the house unless they were discovered. Snape told Draco that most likely the people

inside would be asleep and they should avoid being seen if at all possible. He told him that if they were discovered that they were to disengage and portkey back to the manor. He specifically told Draco that the objective was to cause property damage, scare the occupants and leave.

As Snape was talking to Draco, Hermione quietly knocked on Harry's door. "Harry," she whispered, "Come on out. We're going for a midnight swim."

Harry opened the door and whispered, "My suit's out on the laundry line."

She kissed his cheek and said, "We won't need it. Come on. Bring your wand. It's dark out."

Harry quietly gathered his wand and closed the door behind him. They went down the stairs and quietly opened the back door.

Hit Wizard Wood heard the back door open and went over to investigate. He saw Hermione and the Potter kid come out. She told him that they were going for a moonlight swim and wouldn't make much noise.

He chuckled at them, told them to have fun and walked to the opposite side of the house to give the two teens some privacy.

They went to the pool and Hermione began removing her bathrobe and set it at the edge of the pool. "We're going skinny dipping, silly. Come on in. No one can see us." She kissed his cheek and quietly climbed into the pool. The air was very warm, and the water felt delicious.

Somewhat in shock, Harry set his wand down, took off his pajamas, and glasses, and carefully got into the water.

Hermione found Harry and held his hand as they quietly floated in the water. Harry was nervous, having never been in any sort of similar

situation. She gave him a few minutes and she could hear and feel that he had relaxed, at least slightly. Touching the bottom on her toes, she took a step closer and placed his hand on her right breast. She whispered, "It's OK."

For Harry, the sensation was indescribable. He had never felt anything like it. He could feel her warmth against his hand. As he was moving closer to her, they saw a red and a green flash of light from the other side of the yard.

"Shite. Don't make a sound," whispered Harry.

Dumbledore's instructions had been clear. Arrive, do a bit of property damage, be seen, disengage without hurting anyone and leave. This was an act of finesse. Snape had chosen Draco because he wouldn't ask too many questions, and since he hadn't yet taken the Mark, he wouldn't specifically be questioned about the raid.

Snape had planned on stunning the Auror if they were seen. He knew that the Auror almost always sat on the west side of the house closest to the swimming pool. The portkey that they used wouldn't make the same tell tale Pop that apparation would. Besides with a portkey, Draco didn't need to know the location in advance.

Snape's plan went bad as soon as they appeared. The portkey landed them less than fifteen feet from the Hit Wizard. Their only advantage was that their adrenalin level was high and their wands were out. Wood immediately pulled his wand out and was casting a stunner as his arm was still rising.

Unfortunately Draco had cast the killing curse and had hit Wood as the Hit Wizard's jet of red light was harmlessly striking the ground.

Draco was elated. He'd killed an Auror. The rush of elation was flowing through him as Snape's hand struck his cheek. "Idiot," he hissed. "I'd have stunned him. This wasn't an assassination mission, it was to send a warning message."

Draco started to argue with him as he felt Snape's hand slap his other cheek.

Snape hissed, "We need to ignite the house and be gone in twenty seconds. Can you at least follow those instructions?"

Harry and Hermione had silently slipped out of the pool. Not bothering to get dressed, they grabbed their wands and crept closer.

Snape and Malfoy called Incendio, and the house began to burn for a few seconds and then went out. "Try again," hissed Snape. Incendio. The flames lit the same spots and seemed to burn a bit better this time.

In the light cast by the flames, Harry and Hermione crept closer until they were about fifty feet from the two wearing Death Eater garb.

Harry whispered to his friend, "Use a reducto charm, aim true. I'll take the one on the right. On two."

As the flames shot from their wands a third time, Snape heard the noise from behind him. As he was turning his head, he felt the impact of Hermione's reducto charm as it hit him just inside his right shoulder. The force of the charm normally used to explode a piece of wood or rock, blew most of the flesh from his right side, nearly severing his arm. He crumpled to the ground, blood spurting everywhere.

Harry's charm had hit Draco solidly in the gut. Malfoy's last moment of consciousness was the sight of a naked Harry Potter, illuminated by the sputtering fire, pointing his wand at him. Like his mentor, he crumpled to the ground.

Harry shouted, "Run inside and get Bones on the cell phone on my dresser. The number is 321. Go."

Hermione didn't need telling twice. Harry banished the two wands and stunned the two Death Eaters. A second later he cast the charm

to put out the sputtering fire that the two had attempted to start at the roofline.

The lights went on in the Granger household, and Harry had the presence of mind to go back to the pool and put on his pajama bottoms before he heard the POP, pop, pop, pop, pop, Pop, pop of arriving Aurors, Wit Wizards and Mediwitches.

Inside, Hermione put on another bathrobe and flipped on the outside lights. Amelia Bones arrived fifteen seconds after the others, wand out.

Following their command instruction of Down on the ground, drop your wand, Harry lay on the ground face down.

The Aurors quickly found Wood's body and the two Death Eaters. As the Medi Witch waited for the Aurors to verify that Snape and Malfoy were disarmed, and tossed away the portkeys, they both were losing a lot of blood.

Malfoy began convulsing. His ruined intestines were in bits within a ten foot area of where he'd been hit. There was nothing to be done for him. He died two minutes later, his dreams of following his father's footsteps of cruel fame and glory leaked out onto the grass in the back garden of the house in Crawley.

The Mediwitch cauterized the wounds around Snape's shoulder. She removed the remains of his right arm while another Mediwitch began pouring blood replenishing potion down his unconscious throat. Four units later, he gave a cough, indicating that he had taken a sufficient a volume of the fast acting potion.

Meanwhile Hermione had pounded on her parent's door and they were up.

Several hundred miles away, Dumbledore sat in his circular office waiting for Snape, who he expected to be back at any moment. He hadn't wanted to take the extreme action of frightening the Grangers

to get them to send Harry away, but he felt that he had no other choice. Not knowing the prophecy, they would have no idea of the danger that would await them if Voldemort and his Death Eaters decided to attack their home.

Dumbledore had no idea that his plan had gone so very badly wrong. He had no idea that Severus had drafted Malfoy to come along with him. He had no idea that as he was sitting in his dimly lit office sucking a lemon drop, a hit wizard had been killed and one of his students lay dying.

It would be another hour before he would receive the fire-call message telling him that there had been an attack at the Grangers, two people were dead and his Potions Professor was in critical condition in the secured ward at St. Mungo's.

"Harry, what happened?" asked Bones, as the three Grangers came out of the back door.

Harry replied, "Hermione and I were out in the pool having a swim when we saw a flash of red light and a flash of green light at the other side of the house. Is Michael all right?"

Shaking her head no, Bones urged him to continue.

"We got out of the pool and could see two Death Eaters trying to burn the house down. We snuck up on them and hit them with reducto charms. When I saw that they were down, I told Hermione to go inside and call you. I restunned them, banished their wands and took a look for anyone else.

She could see that he was wearing wet pajama bottoms hastily put on backwards and knew that he was telling the truth. In a soft voice she told him, "Go inside and get dressed. I need to talk with Hermione and her parents for a few minutes."

Hermione had told the identical story. Again the physical evidence confirmed their stories. She had Church perform the Priory

Incantatem charm on each of the wands to validate the last spells performed.

As Bones finished talking with the Grangers, Tonks came up to her and whispered something in her ear. Bones excused herself and Tonks followed out the door. She confirmed that the two Death Eaters were Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy. She authorized the transport of Snape from the scene to St. Mungo's, and Malfoy to the secured holding cell. She asked Senior Auror Church to supervise the examination of the body and for Auror Shetland to catalog everything that was found in the back garden.

There were inconsistencies all over the case. The only things she took as fact were Harry and Hermione's description of the events. She walked back to the pool and found the rest of their clothing by the edge of the pool.

Inside Dan and Emma were trying to understand what had happened and to calm the two teens. Dan wasn't much help, so he stepped outside in time to see the body of Michael Wood being portkeyed away with two of the Aurors. The wizarding war had come to his door.

One of the mediwitches came in and talked with the four for a few minutes. There was nothing more to be done tonight. There were no more questions. The teens' wands had been placed on the kitchen table for them. They could pick them up in the morning. She offered them each a dreamless sleep potion. Five minutes later, the four were sleeping in their rooms. Hammer had volunteered to stay inside for the night while Tonks and Shetland were posted outside. It would be a busy day tomorrow.

Bones woke early. Hopkirk and Susan had volunteered to take care of the details of the inauguration party at the house that night. She felt like she had one more case to work before turning the department over to Hammer on Monday.

The holes in the case had been nagging at her all night. Draco wasn't wearing the Mark, indicating that he wasn't a full-fledged Death Eater

yet. If this had been an initiation exercise for him, she would have expected a group of three to five trainees and at least an equal number of older Death Eaters. She had never heard of a two person training raid. Both Harry and Hermione were consistent in their stories about seeing just the two.

‘Why Snape? Why Draco?’ It was possible that Malfoy had initiated the exercise, but she found it unlikely that Snape would agree to go along. She believed that he was on the light side, spending more of his time working for Dumbledore than Voldemort. There were a thousand ways that Snape could have talked Malfoy out of the idea or told someone about it.

If Malfoy had decided to do it on his own she’d have thought it much more likely that he’d have dragged his school chums Crabbe and Goyle along with him.

She decided that the raid wasn’t planned from the bottom-up, rather that it had been initiated top-down. The question that was on her mind was who ordered the raid?

Dumbledore rubbed his brow for what had felt like the thousandth time that night. The situation had gone completely off track. As he understood it, Michael Wood was dead, Draco was dead, and Severus was in critical but stable condition. More important, Harry still hadn’t been moved to a place of safety.

He would go see Amelia and get the facts. He did not want this misstep to ruin his relationship with Amelia or Harry. Perhaps the story would die with Severus before his deposition.

Alastor walked into his circular office. “Care to own up to something Albus?” Like Bones, the old Master Auror knew that Voldemort would have never ordered Snape to take Draco by himself on a training raid. He doubted that Snape would have initiated an operation on his own. Besides, Snape was a back office guy, who played with his glass containers, not a soldier.

Dumbledore replied, "This has gone very, very wrong. I simply asked Severus to go visit the Grangers and make an appearance to impress on them about the danger of having Harry stay there."

"I'll take care of it," said Moody. "Be someplace highly visible for the next hour." He walked out of the room. 'Why hadn't the old man just left Potter alone?' None of this mess would have happened, and he wouldn't be facing another dirty job.

Dumbledore walked out of the office and found Minerva. "I owe you an apology, Minerva. Let's go to the Three Broomsticks and have breakfast. We haven't visited with Rosmerta for a while." They walked to the fireplace in Dumbledore's office then used the floo to get to the pub. Rosmerta was very talkative and asked them about Bones taking over.

He had been invited to the Inauguration ball that evening and was going to attend with McGonagall. Rosmerta asked Minerva what she was going to wear, and the two women had fun visiting, while Dumbledore sucked on a lemon drop. He would miss Severus, but knew that there was no way to put things back as they had been. Snape had made a bad decision bring the Malfoy boy with him and had paid for it.

Dumbledore remembered back to the promise that many of the Order members had asked him to make after Sirius had come out, not to allow them to be sent to Azkaban. Given the murder of Hit Wizard Wood, there was no way that Severus would face anything less than life in Azkaban, unless it was a dementor's kiss.

As Dumbledore and McGonagall were visiting in the Hogsmeade pub with Rosmerta and several of the villagers, Moody had entered St. Mungo's. Donning his invisibility cloak, he followed two healers into Snape's room. As they were leaving, he silently cast the spell that would stop the man's heart, then walked out as quietly as he came.

He had liked Snape as a person, but detested what he did and how he treated people. Moody was as up front a person as there was.

Snape was not surprised when he felt the spell hit, and drifted out of consciousness a few seconds later.

Moody was not proud of what he had done but knew that Snape would not have been treated with any dignity what-so-ever had Voldemort caught up with him. Azkaban or a date with a dementor were no better. Moody realized that Snape's demise was quite predictable given his profession. Only the timing and the circumstance had been unknown. He stopped by to visit Frank and Alice, then went back home and got ready to attend the inauguration ceremony. Most likely, Snape's death wouldn't be discovered for at least an hour, as the staff believed him to be resting comfortably. The spell was untraceable and highly unlikely to be discovered unless someone was actually watching it being cast.

Dumbledore reviewed the swearing in ceremonial oath that would be administered at noon. It would be the fourth time that he had read it to an incoming Minister of Magic. He used the floo in his office to take him to the MoM lobby. He made certain to say hello to several people and mentally made a note of who they were, before proceeding to the auditorium.

As people began to gather, he spent time visiting with them, all the while keeping his eyes open for Order members or Harry.

As Snape was taking his last breath, Dan and Harry were hitting off the third tee. While walking to their balls, Dan thanked Harry for saving his family the previous night. There was no hint of accusation, or blame. He simply was grateful that the two teens had acted so responsibly and more importantly, hadn't been hurt. Emma was making arrangements to have them visit with a Psychologist friend of hers the next day.

The yard and house had been put back to normal by the time that they had woken up. In reality the charms and wards that the two had placed on the house had worked exceptionally well.

Harry was really grateful that Dan had taken the time to spend the morning with him by himself. Dan was equally grateful that Harry was spending the morning with him. Dan wasn't certain that given the same circumstances, he would have measured up as well as the young man that he counted as family.

"Were you scared when you were out there?" he asked cautiously.

Harry's eyes met Dan's and he replied, "I was scared silly the whole time to tell you the truth. Instinct just sort of took over. Do you know what I mean?"

In truth, Dan had never faced anything remotely resembling two killers trying to burn down his home. He had never faced any serious threats to his or his family's safety, but he was a good man. He nodded and said, "I think so."

Dan had something else that he felt that he had to say. After they had hit their second shot and were walking to the green he said, "Harry, I'm glad you were there. I'm honored to count you as part of our family and just wanted to say thank you. You're a good man Harry."

"Thank you sir. I feel the same about you and Mrs. Granger."

Dan patted him on the back. "You've saved our lives, Harry. How about all of us being on a first name basis? OK?"

Harry nodded, forever grateful to the man for not simply chucking him out of his home. "Yes Sir. OK."

A few holes later, Dan asked, "Did you and Hermione know those men?"

Harry nodded. "One was a teacher at school. The other was just a guy living up to his destiny. To answer your next question, I have no idea why they were there. Director Bones will probably question Snape and find out his reasons. They have some really powerful truth serums. She'll find out."

“He what?” Amelia Bones was livid. Five minutes previously she had been sworn in as the new Minister of Magic, feeling like she had a handle of the case. Now her intended source of explanation was dead. “What happened?”

Shetland didn't enjoy being the bearer of bad news. “He just died. The only people in or out of the room were the healers. I was outside the door the entire morning.”

Bones said, “Get me a list of everyone who checked in, checked out or visited this morning, including the hospital staff. Make sure you're getting the original sign in sheets.”

The head healer, Crabtree came by a few minutes later and advised her that while Snape had been in stable condition, he'd had a total of five and a half units of healing potion. She mentioned that the victim's heart failed over 50 percent of the time in cases where more than four units had been administered.

Be that as it may, Bones still didn't believe that Snape and Malfoy had acted alone.

A/N

Thanks for the kind reviews from chapter 8. I haven't finished answering all of them but will if you have a valid e-mail on your account. The story is getting interesting. I had a couple of building chapters in 5-7, but I hope it is going OK now. Questions:

If directly confronted about it, would Dumbledore admit his actions, justify his actions, worm his way out of it, ignore the question, or outright lie?

Are the Grangers responsible parents continuing to keep Harry at their home in the face of obvious danger?

Lordwar's Harry Potter and the Summer of Change is an outstanding work in progress. 2567419.

Chapter 10

Hermione wasn't doing very well. Emma wasn't surprised. She'd have been scared witless and couldn't say what she'd have done herself. She'd had such a better relationship with her daughter this summer, and didn't want it to slip away. Summoning her courage she asked, "Did you recognize either of those men?"

Hermione was on the sofa tucked into a ball. She nodded. "One of them was a boy at school named Draco Malfoy. He'd always hated me. The other man was Professor Snape. Everyone always told me that he was a bad man, but I believed in him. Why would they try to hurt me?" She was rocking back and forth slightly.

It had been Dan and Emma's plan to try and talk with the two separately and then compare stories later. Emma was shocked at her words. She'd somehow assumed that Harry was the target. Her feeling of fear over the situation turned to anger that anyone would try and hurt her daughter. It made sense. Only a handful of people knew that Harry was even staying there.

Tonks arrived shortly before noon. Harry and Hermione had faced what she prayed she'd never have to do again – battle killers down in combat. There was no doubt that Severus had blood on his hands regardless of the happenings the night before. She gave each of them a hug, and saw the despair in Hermione's eyes.

Unfortunately she hadn't come by to deliver good news. "Hermione, I don't have a less unpleasant way of saying this. I wish I did. Snape died this morning about 9:00." Tears glistened from Hermione's already red and puffy eyes.

Tonks continued speaking clearly in as soft and gentle a voice as she could muster. "There are no charges pending for either of you. No one is thinking anything other than it's a tragedy that it happened, and everyone is relieved that neither of you were hurt. You two did the right thing. You took down the bad guys and you saved your family."

She gave the young woman a hug. "I'm so sorry that this happened to you, but I'm so happy that you didn't get hurt."

In a horse voice, Hermione sobbed, "Why would he have done something like that to me? I know he didn't like me, but I never did anything to deserve this."

Tonks was good at these conversations. "Dr. and Dr. Granger, Hermione and Harry, we need to be crystal clear on this point. None of you did anything to deserve having those two morons come over and attack you or your home. Michael didn't either. Those two each made decisions to come over to do damage and harm. It doesn't matter if someone told them to go or not. They each made a decision to come over in the middle of the night. They made a decision to murder Michael even if that may not have been their original intent. They wouldn't have thought twice about doing the same to you or any member of your family. You didn't have any other choice. I'm just glad that you're all OK." They were each moved by the sincerity in her voice.

Believing that she already knew the answer, Emma took a chance, asking, "Auror Tonks, why do you believe our home was attacked last night?"

Tonks considered her question for a moment and her reasons for asking it. She replied, "Dr. Granger, Britain is full of idiots who hate. Some hate blacks, Indians, Germans, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, or Muslims – for any number of stupid reasons. The Malfoys hated people who were witches or wizards whose ancestors hadn't been witches or wizards themselves. Draco probably was intimidated because your daughter is a much better student, blaming her, because he didn't try to make more of his life. His father had a similar hate."

She continued. "Dr. Granger, the easy answer would have been to say that Malfoy and Snape were trying to kill Harry, but in this instance, I don't think that was the case. It's not widely known that Harry's staying with you. This hasn't been the only attack against muggle born witches or wizards this summer. Unfortunately, it won't be the last. Did I answer your question?"

She made eye contact with Emma, then Dan, who each gave slight nods and then went over to Harry and Hermione. "You each were forced into situations where you had to kill or be killed. It doesn't matter if you were inside sleeping or outside having a swim at the time. They came for you to kill you. You could have run away and let your parents get killed, or you could have frozen up in fear and had all been killed. You both did the best thing that you could. I'm honored to call you both my friends, and this won't change that. The only thing that changes is my increased respect for both of you. Molly was wrong. You're not kids. You two are some of the best people that I know. I'm sorry that this happened, but I'm delighted that none of you were injured."

She looked Hermione in the eye, and asked, "Does that make sense?"

Hermione looked her in the eye and said, "I think so." She put her arms around the young Auror and began sobbing.

Arthur returned home from the ministry at noon on Saturday looking very grim. Molly asked, "What is it, Arthur?"

"There was an attack at the Grangers' last night. Death Eaters attacked about midnight."

Molly gasped and held her hands to her mouth in fear of what she would hear next.

Arthur put down his cloak and said, "Michael Wood was murdered. The Malfoy boy was killed. Severus died this morning."

Molly was so distraught. He had been a friend of Charlie's at school. She asked, "Death Eaters killed Michael and Severus?"

Arthur shook his head and said, "No. Snape and Malfoy killed Michael."

There were tears welled in her eyes. "But how?"

“Harry and Hermione were out in their pool, saw the flash and went to investigate. Snape and Malfoy were trying to burn their home down. Harry and Hermione killed...”

Ron had overheard the conversation and let out a whoop. “I knew he was a greasy Death Eater. I knew it. No more Snape. No more Malfoy. This is great!”

Smack!

Ginny whacked her brother on the back of the head. “Ron, are you vying for the title of the most insensitive git that has ever walked the earth? Your two best friends were forced to each take a life last night. What is wrong with you? Do you suppose they’re sitting around toasting each other? They must feel terrible. Do yourself a favor and take a breath before you say anything else.

“But they’ll be heros in school.”

Smack!

“Don’t - say - another - word.” The anger in her voice would stop a troll in its tracks. Taking a calming breath, she asked, “Dad, are Harry and Hermione OK?”

Her dad nodded. “They weren’t injured. Several of the Aurors are staying at the Grangers. Severus died this morning about 9:00.”

Slowly the reality sunk into Ron’s cinder block head. This wasn’t a case of jelly legs jinx. Sixteen-year-old Draco Malfoy had faced down one or both of his friends planning to kill them and hadn’t been up to the task. In the span of a second, his friends’ lives had been changed forever. He felt sick.

As Amelia was looking through the lengthy list of visitors to St. Mungo's she noticed several names – Narcissa Malfoy, Elsie and Neville Longbottom, Thomas Borgin, Bernice Flatbottom, the

apothecary potions master, Bill Weasley and Alastor Moody. She had no evidence that Snape was murdered, but any of the people on the list may have wanted to see him dead. From what she knew he had mostly enemies and very few friends. One of Voldemort's people could have silenced him. One of Dumbledore's people could have given him a mercy killing. If he were convicted of the murder or assistance in the murder of a hit wizard, Snape would have been killed within a week. The evidence had been damning.

She gave the instructions to Shetland to question each of the people on the list, asking them who they were visiting and try to confirm that the visit actually had taken place. She would know within an hour if their alibis held up.

It was time to get ready for the party.

Tonks had talked Harry and Hermione into going to the Inauguration Ball in spite of everything.. At 4:00 the two witches began getting ready. Tonks apparated to her flat to get her Auror dress uniform. She came back and spent time with Hermione on make up, hair and just being there. Harry sat outside and had a butterbeer with Dan and Emma. The ministry clean-up crew had done a fantastic job cleaning up their back garden and their home. Dan honestly couldn't see anything out of place.

Harry ran through the events in his mind. They had gone outside at midnight. Wood had seen them and moved from his usual spot to the far side of the garden to give them some privacy. They had gone to the pool and slipped in the water. Hermione had taken his hand and placed it on her breast. What a feeling. So soft and warm. For the first time that day, a smile crept on his face. Then he remembered the two flashes a moment apart.

They must have apparated right on top of Wood, surprising all three of them. Why had Snape come to the house? Something was nagging at him. He remembered back in fourth year when he'd seen them appear all together in the graveyard like a pack of wolves. They'd all just appeared in the Department of Mysteries too. Thinking

back they just appeared. Either they were waiting for them or they just appeared. They couldn't have apparated that night directly into the DoM. He hadn't remembered hearing any of the tell tale pops associated with apparation. Either they were there waiting, or they'd taken a portkey. "Harry?"

"Harry. Are you hungry?" Emma looked at him curiously. He'd kind of drifted off into some introspective place of his own.

"I'm fine. Would there be dinner there tonight?"

Emma answered, "Probably not a dinner so much as finger food. How about a pizza before you leave? Dan can go pick one up. Tonks will be going with you and Hermione. Jamie will be keeping us company tonight."

"OK," said Harry. "I could make dinner if you..."

She leaned over and hugged the young man that they'd come to know and love. "Our turn tonight. Sausage and pepperoni?"

"OK, but Hermione likes green olive."

She smiled at him. He was always thinking of others. "We'll get two. You should probably go get ready now. Dan will be back in a half hour. I'll call it in."

Just before dinner, Dan asked everyone to come down for some pictures. Hermione looked, well there was no other word for it, breathtaking. Being a guy, Harry couldn't verbalize it. Her hair was pretty in some sort of a knot in back. (French braid). Her ice blue dress robes fit perfectly. She was beautiful. Harry didn't know the nuances of makeup, eyeliner, or lipsticks, but in his eyes she was beautiful. Tonks looked nice too. Her hair was pageboy length and a sort of buttery blonde. She looked great in her dress Auror uniform.

Dan took all of the photo combinations that he could think of. When he was done, Tonks offered to take a few family photos for them. Tonks took one of the three of them, then Dan invited Harry to be in the last three that she took.

Church was staying with the Grangers for the evening. She had hoped that she would have been able to go to the party, but given the circumstances, she was glad to be alive. She had no illusions that she would have had better luck than Michael last night.

At 7:00 Harry tapped the portkey that Malfalda Hopkirk had sent him. Harry, Tonks and Hermione were at the Bones' back yard a few seconds later. Fortunately they were all holding hands, so no one tripped.

There was no arriving fashionably late for an Inauguration Ball. Within five minutes all of the guests had arrived, filling up the back yard. Susan found them and gave them both a hug, saying, "Auntie told me about your horrible night. I would have been so scared, I don't think I'd have made it. Both of them had always been so mean to Hannah and the rest of us." She hugged Hermione again and said, "I'm so glad that you decided to come. It's just old people here tonight." She looked very pretty. She had scarlet red velvet dress robes, and her shoulder length blonde hair was fixed very nicely, much like Hermione had done.

A minute later a witch about Emma's age came up and introduced herself. "Harry, I'm Malfalda Hopkirk. We've had correspondence before, but haven't met." She smiled at him indulgently.

Harry smiled back at her. "I remember. You sent me a letter four years ago because a house elf used a hover charm at my aunt's house. It was kind of funny. Dobby the house elf was floating a pudding then it smashed when it fell on the floor."

Hopkirk flushed red and said, "I apologize for that. I wasn't sure it was you, but you were the only registered wizard or witch on the street. So what happened to the pudding?"

"My uncle went off on me a bit, locked me in my room, and fitted bars over the windows. It wasn't the best."

Hopkirk felt sick at his response. She said, "I'm so sorry. I didn't know."

Harry smiled at her. He wasn't mad at her. She'd simply asked a question, but he was done covering up his treatment from the Dursleys. He replied, "No worries. It doesn't really matter anymore. I did get into trouble a year ago when I used a patronus charm after Delores Umbridge set two dementors on me and my cousin."

Nearly in tears, Hopkirk said, "I'm sorry, Harry. You didn't deserve that either."

Harry responded lightly. "You were just doing what you were told to do. It's too bad that kids can't do more to defend themselves. I suppose you sent a letter to Draco Malfoy last night."

Hopkirk nodded. "I'm sorry about that too Harry."

Harry shook his head. "No worries. That really wasn't my point. The bad guys don't give a thought to breaking rules like that. If some kid hesitates for even an extra second and is slow to defend himself or herself, they'll be dead."

His words made sense. "What do you suggest?"

"Lowering the age to fifteen and stating that everyone is allowed to properly defend themselves without fear of punishment."

She nodded and said, "I see your point. Perhaps Minister Bones will be willing to change those rules."

"Maybe. It was nice meeting you, Ma'am."

As he walked away, she said, more to herself, "Be careful Harry."

"Hello Miss Granger."

Hermione smiled at her favorite professor and said, "Hi Professor McGonagall. You look fabulous tonight." She had her dress robes on with a tartan sash.

Pleased that anyone would notice the change, Minerva replied, "Thank you Hermione. So do you. I'm glad to see you. Are you all right?"

Hermione could be honest with her. She shook her head, saying, "No, but I will be."

Minerva said, "I'm so disappointed in Severus. I never would have believed that he would have done such a thing."

"Me neither. I never did anything to hurt him. He was always so mean to the students outside of his own house. He constantly intimidated students outside of his class for no reason. I believe that a lot of witches and wizards have ended up in different careers because they were afraid to take advanced potions because of his intimidation. What really was wrong was that people allowed it to happen."

Minerva nodded, urging her brilliant student to continue.

"Professor Dumbledore allowed it, the board of school governors allowed it, and parents allowed it by not complaining loudly enough."

Minerva was justifiably embarrassed. "As did I, and for that I apologize personally to you." Taking a steadying breath she asked, "Hermione, may I ask you a sensitive question?"

The beautiful young woman nodded yes.

In a low voice Minerva asked, "Are you certain that there were only two Death Eaters there last evening?"

Thinking for a moment, Hermione said, "I'm positive, Professor, unless there were others waiting in the front of the house. If there had been more, I'd have expected them to have attacked us. Why do you ask?"

McGonagall wasn't sure why she asked, but something didn't seem right about it to her. 'They usually attacked in packs like wild dogs. Maybe it was just Snape's perverse idea of a quiet boys' night out.'

She replied, "It seems unusual that there were only the two of them." Seeing that the young woman was nearly in tears, she changed the subject. "Your OLW results should arrive tomorrow. Have you decided which classes you'd like to take next term?"

Her tactic had worked. Hermione's eyes brightened as if a switch had been turned on. "Yes of course. I'm signing up for transfiguration, charms, arithmancy, runes, healing, defense and potions. I've already read my books on..."

Minerva smiled, nodding, pleased to see her favorite student happy again.

Molly and Arthur found Harry getting swarmed by well-meaning witches who seemed to believe that he needed whispered information about virtually non-existent pieces of fabric that they may have been wearing. Molly shooed them away and gave Harry one of her famous hugs. When she let him up for air, she said, "Hello Harry dear. We've been so very worried about you this summer, but we never expected Severus to..."

Arthur cut in. "Molly, He's probably heard too much about that as it is. Harry, we wanted to thank you again for the support that you gave our family. It means everything to us."

"You don't need to say anything Mr. Weasley. I could never repay the kindness that your family has always shown me. Besides it was the right thing to do."

Arthur shook his hand and said, "Thank you Harry. You always have a home with us if you need it. I was told to ask, Ginny was wondering if she could come and see you and Hermione tomorrow."

Harry nodded and replied, "She could come for breakfast or dinner. I know Hermione misses seeing her too. If the weather is sunny, she should bring a bathing outfit. They have a nice pool."

Arthur shook his hand again. "I'll suggest that she come in the morning. Thanks again, Harry."

While Arthur was talking with Harry a tall woman with sharp features approached Hermione and introduced herself. "Miss Granger, I'm Teresa Miller. I'm honored to meet you."

Hermione remembered the name. "You're on the board of school governors. You were one of three dissenting votes that went against the appointment of Umbridge as headmistress of the school last year. It's nice to meet a woman of principle."

"Thank you, but I really wanted to thank you for your part in uncovering the truth about he-who, Voldemort last month. You're a very courageous woman and you have the respect of many of the school governors."

"Thank you, Teresa. I appreciate that very much." Hermione loved Harry dearly, but it was nice to be recognized for her own work too.

"Hermione is it true that you were attacked by Professor Snape last evening?"

Hermione nodded, not wanting to give away any of the details.

Teresa replied, "Minister Bones indicated in her Inauguration speech that she wanted a wizarding government that treated its citizens fairly and rewarded them based on ability, not heritage. As such, when you finish school, I'd like you to consider a career within the wizarding government. We need capable wizards and witches like yourself who have the intelligence, integrity and the vision to make a difference."

Hermione smiled at her and said, "Thank you. It seems like a long ways away right now, but time moves quickly. It was nice meeting you."

In between smothering hugs and other offers of less wholesome affection, Harry saw Ragnot and walked over to say hello. The head goblin saw Harry and greeted him. "Good evening, Mr. Potter. I'm glad to hear that you and Miss Granger are well."

Harry knew that the goblin was sincere in his words and said, "Hello Ragnot. I wanted to thank you again for the kindness and assistance that you have provided me with. I'm nearly through with the two books that you gave me. I'd like to come in again next week after I have finished with them if you might have the time to see me." Harry wanted to understand his holdings, and was making an effort to learn more.

Ragnot replied, "I would be happy to assist you Mr. Potter. Your holdings are quite extensive and everyone will do better as you begin to assume effective control over them. If it would be possible, just owl me and let me know when you might be arriving."

"I will. Thank you again."

"You're welcome, and anytime that you may wish to visit one of your vaults, please ask for me. I enjoyed the change of routine as much as Miss Granger's mother enjoyed the ride. We both benefited."

Harry smiled as he walked over to visit with Moody. He knew that Ragnot had probably not made a similar offer to anyone in Harry's lifetime. Emma would be thrilled to have another opportunity to see a dragon.

The old Auror saw Potter and checked him out with his magical eye. "Hello Potter. It's an interesting gathering. You did a good thing nudging Fudge out of office. It was time for him to move on, before he got anyone else killed with his bad decisions."

Harry nodded. He knew Moody was genuine with his words.

Alastor asked, "Other than visits from Death Eaters, how's your summer going?"

Harry replied, "Good. I'm making some of my own choices and am learning how to take care of myself. The people I'm staying with are treating me well, and Ragnok has been helping me a lot with my business stuff. Between studying and practicing different charms, I've also learned how to swim and play golf."

Moody nodded. "It was a good choice of spells that you made last night. Your choice was quick to call, effective and hard to block." Harry nodded, pleased at the old Auror's praise, knowing that he rarely gave it. Moody saw that Potter had understood and continued, saying, "No one knows how to play golf. Everyone's learning. The same holds true for fighting Death Eaters. Always keep learning."

Again, Harry knew that there was a lot of truth in Moody's words.

"Constant vigilance. Wood got surprised, and was beaten by an amateur, not taking anything away from you, but he should be here tonight. Constant vigilance, Potter."

Harry thought he understood the Old Auror's message. Anyone could be surprised and beaten. He asked, "Why do you suppose Snape showed up in the first place?"

Moody reflected the question replying, "You were there. What do you think?"

Harry replied. "There are four possibilities. Malfoy suggested it, Snape suggested it, Riddle ordered it, or someone else ordered it. Moody nodded in agreement. Harry continued, saying, "I don't think Malfoy suggested it to Snape. He'd have asked Bellatrix or his idiot friends. Snape isn't a soldier. He was a spy. You decide for who."

Moody was curious where Potter was going to take this and nodded.

Harry continued. "He'd have no reason to take a risk unless someone asked him to. I don't think it was Riddle who ordered the attack. He'd have sent a larger group and someone other than Snape to lead it if

he was going after Hermione. He'd have sent everyone if he was going after me. It just doesn't make sense. At least the wards and charms worked properly."

Moody had been impressed to hear that the Granger home hadn't burned down from a wizarding fire. Potter and the Granger girl must have put some thought into their warding work. He deflected Potter's line of reasoning, asking "What about Narcissa? She'd have her reasons." Moody had seen her in St. Mungo's visiting another witch.

Harry nodded. He hadn't thought about Draco's mum. 'Hermione'd helped put Lucius in prison, and Malfoy probably whined about Hermione constantly. If she'd asked Snape to go with her son, he'd have gone.' Harry replied, "Makes sense."

"Constant vigilance, Potter. A lot of good people are counting on you. Take care of yourself." He walked off. 'Potter was a good kid. No, he'd killed a man in combat. Regardless of his age, he no longer was a kid.'

Back at Crawley, Dan and Emma were visiting with Auror Jamie Church. She asked, "How are Harry and Hermione doing?"

"Better individually and together than I would have expected," replied Emma.

Jamie nodded, understanding her implied message. "I've never had to take a life. I pray every time that I start a shift that I'll get home safely, and won't have to hurt anyone. It's almost an impossible dream in the middle of a wizarding war."

Emma asked, "Whose war is it? On one side there's this Voldemort person. On another side, there are the kids. They seem to have done most of the fighting in the last year. Why are the Aurors entirely defensive in their actions? Harry seems to know where this Voldemort lives. Others must too. Why not go after him?"

Church would have been offended, but knew the truth in her words. Jamie replied, "Fudge wouldn't allow it. Until a month ago, he didn't even acknowledge Voldemort's existence."

Emma asked, "Why is our side so splintered? There seems to be more fighting between Professor Dumbledore and the Ministry than the light and dark side."

Church realized that Hermione's brilliance was inherited. She replied, "True. Again Fudge wouldn't allow any real action on our part. Dumbledore has his private army. He defeated the last dark lord. At least he hasn't been sitting back doing nothing like Fudge did. I don't think Minister Bones will either."

Emma asked, "Who's in this private army of his?"

Church replied, "I don't know. I just know it exists."

Emma thought to herself, 'That's another topic for another day.' She replied, "It's getting late. They should be getting home soon. Dan and I want to thank you for watching over our family every day. We really do appreciate your help."

Church nodded. There was a tear in her eye. 'Michael died defending a worthwhile cause.'

Back at the Inaugural ball, the new Director of Magical Games and Sports, Holly Bruce came up and introduced herself to Harry. She told him that Umbridge had no authority to impose a lifetime ban on him regarding playing Quidditch. She had been at the game and had seen nothing wrong with Harry's reaction to being attacked and insulted. As such, he was free to play with any team that would have him. Harry thanked her and went to find Hermione.

As he found her, the string quartet started playing. The first dance had been reserved, but after that anyone could go up. Hermione looked so beautiful. She asked, "Will you dance with me, Harry?"

Harry smiled, and replied, "I'd love to." Taking her hand they made their way out to the floor and enjoyed each other's company. Dan and Emma had been very adequate instructors. Harry and Hermione moved well together. Gone were the fourteen-year-old shy children. If nothing else the last year and a half had given them self-confidence, and in the last month they'd grown very comfortable with each other. They only had eyes for each other. No piece of offered apparel would change that. They were in love even if they hadn't gotten around to formalizing or even verbalizing it.

They danced together three times and went to get a butterbeer. They met Dumbledore by the bar. He'd been talking with Moody who left to go see someone else. Dumbledore greeted them and asked if they would be willing to visit with him for a minute. They went and sat at a table. Dumbledore flicked his wand and cast a silencing charm around them.

He started with the words that Harry found so tiring. "Harry for your own protection, I must insist that you abandon your plan to remain a guest at the Grangers for the rest of the summer and come to live either at the castle or your home at Grimmauld place. The attack last night has brought far too much attention to your situation. Riddle will learn of your involvement and come after you."

Hermione replied, "Thank you for your suggestion, Professor, but it's not your decision. Harry's living arrangements have nothing to do with school. I thought Minister Bones was clear on that issue."

Ignoring her, he continued. "Harry, for the greater good, you need protecting."

"So I can be your weapon and meet my prophesized destiny. No thanks. You never gave me any training. I may reconsider my schooling options for the next term."

Dumbledore was getting frustrated. "Harry, you cannot remain at the Grangers' home. You need to be someplace safer."

Harry got up to leave. He flicked his wand to end the charm, and in a remarkably calm voice replied, "Professor, I own seventeen homes. I

can pay for a private army if I need one. These people know me, and they enjoy my company. They don't lock me in my bedroom or in a cupboard. They don't make me wear rags or act like I'm a mistreated house elf. They feed me properly and make certain that I have proper eyeglasses. They trust me with their daughter, and you want to take it away. According to Gringotts, I'm the wealthiest wizard in England, and according to you I can't even have a girlfriend. What is it that you feel that I owe you?"

"Harry please, I accept that I've made many mistakes, but your safety is my primary concern."

"If my safety is such a concern, than please tell me who sicced Malfoy and Snape on the Grangers. It wasn't Riddle. I don't think it was Malfoy or Snape. That leaves a pretty short list, doesn't it? Goodnight, Professor."

Dumbledore remained seated as Harry and Hermione walked off. He wondered how Harry had found out about Severus.

Amelia walked to the table and sat down, she flicked her wand to create another silencing zone around them. "This isn't a simple domestic dispute any longer Dumbledore. One of my Aurors is dead. The wizarding world would be very disappointed if I found out that you had anything to do with this. If Harry can figure it out, or get close, then others will too. Run your school, hire proper instructors, and teach our children. Leave Harry alone. Shut your Order down, and we'll get along. Are we clear on this?" There was no smile on her face, and she never hesitated in her words.

Dumbledore nodded. Things were not going well.

A/N

With a functioning MoM is the Order needed?

Would the Order fall apart if they were told (most of) the truth? (I sent Severus over to check up on Harry. Gosh, I don't know what happened.)

Chapter 11

Dan and Emma went inside leaving Auror Church to make her rounds outside. They were justifiably concerned at the obvious increase in the danger level in their lives. It had been years since they had thought about locking the doors on their home at night, yet they were locked right now.

They talked about the best course of action for their family. They were very comfortable in their home and business in Crawley, but they weren't married to them. They were comfortable with their daughter's abilities, but would ask her to change wizarding schools in a blink if they thought she would be safer.

They had concluded that the source of the danger was the wizarding world's rather unprogressive attitudes, which pitted blood against ability. While they weren't certain which side would prevail, they were convinced that it would end quickly.

Dan said, "Harry and Hermione obviously know how to take care of themselves."

Emma added, "And each other. Are we going to ask them what they were doing out at midnight in the first place?"

Dan, replied, "No. Let's assume that they were skinny dipping, and be thankful that they were out there."

Emma said, "The protective wards that they put on the house must have worked. Hermione lit a hot fire in the barbeque yesterday in about a second. Connie Hammer told me that those men had tried three times each to start the house on fire." She held his hand, and said, "They're good together. When do we leave for holiday?"

"The first of August. We fly out of Heathrow at 9:00. Did Harry get a passport?"

Emma nodded. "Yes. Director Bones dropped it over on Wednesday. Guess what?"

Dan replied with an indulgent smile, "You saw another dragon."

She smiled at her best friend. "No. The ledgers that the Goblins gave him indicate that he's really rich."

"What's really rich?"

Straight faced, she replied, "Three hundred million."

Dan shook his head for a moment, then asked, "Harry's got three hundred million Sterling?"

"Galleons."

Dan shook his head. "That's over a billion in Sterling."

Emma smiled. "Yes, but you took him into our home when he was dressed in rags."

He smiled back at her. "Yes, but you told me to. That makes you the genius."

She squeezed his hand. "True, but that wasn't my point. Hermione is the named beneficiary in his Will."

Dan asked, "Does she know?"

"I have no idea. Until two weeks ago, I don't think he had any idea, either."

Dan thought for a moment and said, "He's brought a lot of changes into our lives."

Emma said, "I'd phrase it differently. Hermione's brought a lot of changes into our lives. Her other friend from school barely has five quid to his name. They're not all wealthy, just him. Hermione wants to do something special for his birthday on Wednesday."

Dan asked, "What does she have in mind?"

“I think she wanted to have a few of their school friends over, but that was before...”

Dan understood. Things had changed on Friday night. He didn't know what to say.

Emma said, “She probably invited him outside Friday night to share a special time together, and they ended up sharing a horrible adventure together.”

Dan nodded. “You're right, and I wouldn't wish what they had to do that night on anyone, but they saved each other and us. That's pretty special.”

She smiled at her lover. “You're pretty special. Let's go to bed. We'll hear them come in, and can grill them tomorrow. Never mind. Here they are now.”

Hermione walked in with Harry a few steps behind her. She said, “Hi Mum. Hi Dad.”

“Hi Hermione. Hi Harry. How was your evening?”

Hermione replied, “Pretty good. Actually it was great. The string quartet was really good, and we danced three times. We had a chance to meet and visit with some interesting people. I met a witch from the board of school governors. She asked me to contact her after school about a position.”

Emma nodded encouragingly at her daughter and asked Harry, “How about you, dear? Did you have fun?”

Harry replied, “I got to dance three times with a beautiful witch. My lifetime ban on playing Quidditch was reversed, and we had fun talking with Susan.”

Hermione asked, “Who else did you visit with?”

“Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. That reminds me. Ginny wants to stop over tomorrow. I also talked with Ragnot and Moody. Ragnot told me that

you could come again and see the dragons if you wanted.” Emma winked at him.

Hermione persisted. “What did Moody have to say?”

There was no smile on Harry’s face as he replied, “He suggested that Narcissa Malfoy may have been behind the attack. He was pleased that we’d put up the protection wards.”

Hermione persisted. “Who else did you visit with?”

“A bunch of goofy witches. They were all talking about their underwear.”

Emma glanced at Dan who started laughing uncontrollably. Emma asked, “What were they telling you Harry?”

“Dunno. I wasn’t paying attention to a thing that they were talking about,” replied Harry.

“Good answer, Harry,” quipped Dan, who with each passing moment had increased respect for the young man.

Emma eyed Hermione and smiled, knowing that was exactly what she’d wanted to hear.

Hermione smiled back at her mum, the unspoken message sent and received. Then her smile disappeared. “We also talked with Professor Dumbledore.”

Harry said, “I think he knew that Snape might have planned to come by and didn’t tell us. He didn’t make any apologies about the attack or Snape’s involvement. I’m sick of his keeping secrets.”

Dan looked at the teens and said, “You don’t know that for a fact. We may never know how it started. We’re just grateful that you two kept your heads, did your magics, and none of us got hurt. Mum and I are going to bed. We love you. Good night.”

“Good night,” said both teens at once.

Harry started to get up, but Hermione held him back. "I thought maybe we could visit a bit more."

Harry said, "OK. "I'll go get us a butterbeer."

He came back and sat by Hermione. She looked at him with her bright eyes and asked, "Harry, are we a couple?"

Harry replied, "I'd like us to be. Would you?"

She smiled at him and leaned closer, so that her lips almost touched his. Harry leaned forward, and there was only one word for it.

Magic.

"Wow," said Harry, who after the disastrous first kiss with Cho had never tried to kiss anyone properly since.

"Mmm," said Hermione. "I liked that. Thanks."

"Me too," said Harry

"Harry, I'm not asking you to say anything, or feel anything that you may not feel or be comfortable saying, but I want you to know that I love you."

Harry replied, "Thanks. I can't remember anyone ever saying that to me before today. It feels really nice. I'm not very good at saying these things, but I love you too, Hermione. You mean everything to me."

She was tired, but her eyes were bright with joy. "Thank you Harry. You say those things perfectly. This has been a big day for us. I'm glad I had you to share it with. It's pretty late. We should get to sleep. We'll try skinny dipping again another night."

Harry beamed at her. "I'd like that."

Ginny arrived at 8:00 on Monday. Auror Shetland arrived a few minutes later. Minister Bones was having a meeting with all of the Senior Aurors and the hit wizards, and Church and Hammer had been asked to attend. Emma brought out a cup of coffee and introduced herself.

Ginny hugged Hermione then went over to hug Harry. "It's good to see you both. I'd have brought my git of a brother over, but he was too busy getting his foot out of his mouth as it is. Seriously, we were all sorry to hear of the attack and what you had to do, but we're so grateful that you're OK. I have no idea how much it must hurt, but we know that you did the only thing that you could. Snape and Malfoy made some really bad choices, and their actions took away a bit of your lives."

Hermione said, "Thanks, Ginny. We're OK and we're getting better. We know it wasn't our fault, and we know that we did what we had to do. Everyone from the Aurors to Minister Bones told us the same thing. It hurts, but we'll get past it together."

Ginny had listened carefully and understood what Hermione had said. She replied, "I'm really happy for you both. You both are good for each other and deserve a bit of happiness. Have you told anyone or did you two just figure it out today?"

Hermione replied to her best girlfriend, "Last night actually, but thanks for the thought. No, we're still trying to tell each other. Everyone else will have to wait until we get that part straight. A lot of really good things and some really bad things have happened this summer. My best friend became more than that. He stood up to Dumbledore and Fudge. Harry and my dad have become friends. My mum thinks he's cute, and I taught Harry how to swim properly."

Ginny gave Hermione a lusty wink and asked, "Been doing the breaststroke Harry?" Hermione turned flame red. Ginny smiled and said, "I'm sorry you two. I couldn't resist."

Harry joked back. "Actually, that lesson was cut a bit short. I'll probably need a repeat some time. Seriously, Hermione's been my best friend for a long time and I came to realize how much more she

really means to me. I love her, and I'm just grateful that she sees the real me and likes me anyway."

Ginny gave a wishful look and replied, "That's so sweet. Harry, you've had to face a lot of really crappy things, and you always came out the stronger person. You can take a summer to live without feeling guilty." She was careful not to mention the attack, knowing that the two of them would still have raw feelings over it.

A/N

Would it be in character for Hermione to want to move their relationship to "the next level?"

If she did, would Harry comply with her wishes?

Chapter 12

“Happy birthday, Harry.”

Harry was lost in thought remembering the events of the attack. Malfoy died within minutes and Snape had died the next morning. Harry recalled that Hermione had hit him with a pretty solid reducto charm to the shoulder, but the healers had arrived immediately after. Harry had questioned how serious the man’s injuries really were. He didn’t think that Snape had been mortally wounded, but about 9:00 AM he died. When Harry inquired, Moody had quickly suggested that Narcissa was probably behind the attack.

Harry kept wondering to himself, ‘Why did Snape die?’ Unfortunately, the one person who might know was the one person who Harry trusted least at the moment.

“Harry?” Emma gave him a quizzical look.

“Sorry,” he replied. “I was just thinking about something. What can I help with today?”

“Harry, Dan and I have morning appointments at the surgery. I’ll be back to take you and Hermione to Diagon Alley for a few hours then we’ll have dinner. Are you sure you want to stay in tonight and barbecue? We’d be glad to take you out for dinner.”

Harry met her eyes, saw her smile and he said, “What ever would be easiest for you. I don’t want to be a bother.”

She gave his arm a friendly squeeze and said, “That’s so sweet. You’re never a bother, Harry. We’ll have dinner in. I’ll be home by noon. Keep Hermione company. OK?”

Harry nodded and replied, “I’m happy to help. Bye.”

Harry went in and found Hermione curled up on a sofa in the family room reading a book on arithmancy. He sat down by her and said, “There’s an angel reading in the family room. I should get a camera, and take a photo.”

Hermione stood up and gave Harry a hug and kiss. "Happy birthday, Mr. Potter. Can I keep you company today?"

Harry couldn't remember receiving a better birthday greeting. He kissed her back, and said, "That would make this a perfect day. Thank you."

There was a gentle knock on the door. Hermione opened the door and invited Professor Dumbledore into the family room. He greeted her in a friendly manor, "Hello Miss Granger. Is Harry available?"

Harry walked out of the kitchen with three butterbeers. "Hello Professor." I was just thinking about you.

"Kindly, I hope," said Dumbledore, smiling.

"Mostly, sir," replied Harry, smiling back.

"I'll get some glasses," said Hermione, wanting to give the two a few moments to converse in private.

When she had left, Harry quietly asked, "Professor, what happened to Snape? He wasn't mortally wounded, yet he died a little after nine the next morning."

Dumbledore surveyed Harry for a moment, considering whether to try legilimency on him, provide an evasive answer, or tell him of the oath that Snape had taken wishing to avoid being sent to Azkaban. Instead, he tried an old policeman technique. He asked a question and didn't say anything, to let Harry fill the silence. "I'm not positive Harry. I wasn't at St. Mungo's. What do you think happened to him?"

Harry considered his words carefully then replied, "I think someone helped him along." Dumbledore remained silent, and Harry filled the silence by saying, "I don't think it was a Death Eater, because it was too clean." He hadn't accused Dumbledore of anything, but there was no ambiguity in the young man's words either.

Dumbledore remained silent. His relationship with Harry was at a crossroads. He could tell Harry the truth, or tell him the whole truth, or provide an evasive answer. He settled for a truth. "I believe that Severus was spared serving a life term in Azkaban for his participation in the murder of Michael Wood. Several years ago, he had made a request that any reasonable means be used to avoid his having him sent to Azkaban in the event that he was arrested. He certainly would have been convicted, whether he directly murdered Michael or not." Dumbledore didn't indicate whether Snape's wizard's pact was made with the Order or Voldemort.

Harry nodded darkly. "Would you be willing to say as much to Hermione, or does she need to go through her life believing that she killed a man?"

Dumbledore saw Hermione coming back and quietly replied, "We can finish this conversation another day. I will abide by your guidance." Somewhat louder he said, "I stopped by to wish you a very happy birthday, and to bring you something that I hope you will find useful." He produced a rather large, carefully wrapped package and handed it to Harry.

"Thank you, Professor," replied Harry. They sat down on the sofa next to Hermione. Harry carefully opened the package. It was solicitor's pensive, light gray with a dozen small runes surrounding the rim. While not as ornately decorated as Dumbledore's, it was still quite beautiful in its own right. Harry was stunned by the wonderful gift and could only exclaim "Wow! Thank you, Professor. This is great!"

Hermione looked at it curiously, having never seen one before. "What is it?" she asked.

Dumbledore replied, "It is a pensive, specifically a solicitor's pensive. Someone can place a memory in the dish like so. Dumbledore placed his wand to his temple and withdrew a long silver thread and placed it into the bowl. He tapped the bowl with his wand and an image of the great hall appeared much like a 3D hologram. They watched for a minute as an eleven year old Lilly Evens was sorted into Gryffindor.

Tears welled in Harry's eyes. "Thank you, Professor. The only other time that I can remember hearing my mum speak wasn't so pleasant." Dumbledore nodded, withdrew another strand and placed it in the bowl. Again he gave it a little tap. The three of them watched in silence for ten minutes as the image of James and Lilly appeared exchanging wedding vows.

Hermione gave Dumbledore a hug. "Thank you, Professor. This is the best gift that you could have given Harry." Dumbledore smiled and pulled two last threads and placed them into the bowl. Again he tapped it. An image appeared of a seventh year James Potter being presented and holding up the Quidditch cup. The other image showed a nineteen year old Sirius Black riding on his motorcycle.

Dumbledore got up to leave. He said, "You can replay the memories as often as you wish. Unlike my own pensive, placing your memory in this one does not remove it from your memory, rather takes a copy so you can share it with others. This scroll will explain how to use it. Enjoy your day, both of you."

Harry was almost speechless. At the last moment, he stood and said, "Thank you very much, Professor. Thank you." Any anger that he may have had toward Dumbledore vanished that morning. He'd come as close as he could to giving Harry his parents back.

Dumbledore smiled, opened up the back door, walked to the edge of the hedge and disappeared. He was clearly pleased with himself. He had answered Harry's question without implicating Moody and left him with happier memories of his parents and Sirius.

After they had watched the memories a second time, Hermione asked Harry if he would like to go swimming. She had a sly grin on her face and said, "I'll wear my white bikini, and hopefully create another happy memory for you." She had a very good idea of the impact that it had on Harry.

He smiled back and said, "I'd like that very much." Any thoughts of Snape had completely left Harry's conscious. She returned a few minutes later wearing the little white string bikini. She turned around lifted up her hair, and asked Harry if he would mind retying the top for her. Harry's hands trembled slightly as he unloosened the top knot and carefully redid the bow for her.

She turned around, kissed him on the cheek, saying "Breathe Harry. You're so sweet." She kissed him again on the cheek. Harry shivered as he felt the soft cloth brush against his chest.

An hour later they were still having fun splashing and swimming back and forth. Harry had become a good swimmer in the month that he had spent at the Grangers.

They made a salad and put it back in the refrigerator until Emma came home for lunch. She arrived with a very large package of steaks, and other things for the evening meal.

After lunch, they drove into Diagon Alley. Harry had business at Gringotts. Hermione and Emma volunteered to go to the vault with him. Harry exchanged a thousand galleons for French currency for the trip. Hermione took Harry to the bookstore where they purchased their schoolbooks and a half dozen extra books each. Hermione had found some books on healing while Harry selected books on invisibility, occlumency, legilimency and streetfighting.

Newly installed Director Connie Hammer was very good at reading mixed signals. Minister of Magic Amelia Bones had given her clear instruction to proceed with the investigation of the mysterious death of Severus Snape. In reality, the department of magical law enforcement had a dotted line reporting relationship to Minister Bones and a dotted line to the Wizengamot. The Wizengamot was responsible for the confirmation of the appointment of the head of the department, while the Minister of Magic had the final approval of the department budgets. Hammer couldn't afford to alienate either.

In a chance meeting with Professor Dumbledore several days after the attack, he had made a casual comment that Snape's death was unfortunate, but probably wasn't worth investing a lot of time looking into. At the time, Church had interpreted Dumbledore's comments based on his position as Hogwarts Headmaster. It certainly didn't enhance the school's reputation that the head of one of the houses was in fact a Death Eater who had been killed while attempting to murder the family of one of the school's most prominent students.

Hammer had read the reports regarding Snape's death. In summary they indicated that he had been hit with a reducto charm that had hit him below his left collarbone. The blast had effectively severed his arm at the shoulder. He had received five units of blood restorative potion at the scene. The mediwitches had cauterized the wound before transporting him to St. Mungo's.

No additional blood restorative potion had been administered while at St. Mungo's. At six AM, Snape was again examined and found to have a regular heartbeat. Even though he had not yet regained consciousness, he was believed to be in stable condition and resting comfortably. At seven, he was again checked with no change to his condition.

Hammer knew that half of patients given more than four units of blood restorative potion had their hearts stop within the first six hours. After six hours, the likelihood of complications began dropping. Snape had arrived at St. Mungo's shortly before one AM, thus it stood to reason that he would have developed complications by seven or eight if he were going to.

From what she knew and had read of the man, he had an abundance of enemies, almost no friends and very few supporters. She personally believed that he had succumbed to his injuries or had quietly been murdered by another Death Eater who did not want the information that he doubtless possessed to be made public.

Hammer knew that Bones had access to the same information. Determining that Snape had died as a result of wounds inflicted by the Granger girl, or by someone else wouldn't bring Michael back... 'But it might bring closure for the young witch.' Hammer realized that

Bones was pressing the investigation in an attempt to make things right with the Grangers.

“Obliviate.”

Moody looked up at Dumbledore, gave him a strange look and asked, “What were we talking about?”

Dumbledore looked at Moody for a moment and replied, “We were talking about teaching candidates. You must have dozed off, old friend. Perhaps you were thinking about helping Kingsley with the defense instructor position. Did you want to give it another try?”

Moody replied, “Maybe. I might have something to offer the older students. I’ll let you know tomorrow. Are you going to the dinner at the Grangers?”

“I stopped by earlier in the day. Enjoy your day, Alastor.”

“You too, Dumbledore.”

“Surprise!”

In the blink of an eye, Harry had his wand out ready to fire. Instead of Death Eaters, he looked up and saw a very nervous looking Fred and Tonks standing in front of a group equally nervous young witches and wizards.

“I told you to just go with Happy Birthday, Fred. We could have all been blasted, but would you listen? Nooo. Cor, my hair turned blonde, and my shirt must have shrunk. Gods, he’s fast.” Embarrassed, she turned and said, “Happy birthday, Harry.”

Harry glanced at her for a moment, suppressed an equally embarrassed smile, and replied, “Thank you, Tonks.”

“Happy birthday, Harry,” said Alicia, Katie and Angelina. They each gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek. “Thanks for inviting us, Hermione. It’s great to see you too. This is so nice,”

It looked like most of the previous term fifth, sixth, and seventh year Gryffindors had been invited, as well as Ginny, Molly, Arthur, Tonks, Remus, Moody, McGonagall, the house guard Aurors, Amelia and Susan Bones. Several members of the DA from other houses also came.

Harry was dumfounded. He’d never had a birthday party before, at least in his memory. Dan was grilling steaks, and had a big smile when Harry looked his way. There were several tubs of iced sodas and butterbeer around. Dan had set up a half dozen tables in the back garden. He must have been working on it all afternoon while they were in London.

Molly found Harry, and gave him one of her famous hugs. “It’s good to see you. Harry. You look good.”

“Thanks, Mrs. Weasley,” replied Harry. “I’ve had a good holiday so far. I’m sorry that we haven’t had much of an opportunity to visit yet this summer.”

“Hi, Mrs. Weasley,” said Hermione.

Molly replied, “Hello, dear. Thank you for inviting us. We have so missed seeing Harry and you this holiday.”

Hermione said, “We’ll try and visit for a day the last week in August. We miss you too.” She tried to imply that they were a couple with her choice of words.

Emma was wandering around, taking photos of different groups of people. Hermione had rarely invited friends over after the age of nine or ten, and she intended to make the most of the occasion. Each of the witches and wizards took the time to introduce themselves to her and visit for a minute. The all seemed to be very polite.

Susan Bones walked up to Hermione, and gave her a hug. Softly she said, "Auntie finally told me the details about the attack. It must have been terrifying."

Tears welled in Hermione's eyes. "Susan, I was so scared. It was over in less than a minute. Oliver's brother, Michael had been so nice to us."

Susan gave her a sad smile and replied, "You and Harry saved your family. You did what you had to do." She gave Hermione another hug.

Hermione nodded and replied, "Thanks Susan."

The first batch of steaks was coming off the grill and people began to sit down to eat. Not surprisingly, Ron was first in line. The conversation at his table focused on Malfoy, Snape, Quidditch and speculation about who Dumbledore might get for potions and defense professors.

Remus came up and greeted Harry, who was standing keeping Dan company while the second batch of steaks was cooking. "Happy birthday, Harry. Professor Dumbledore said that he had given you a solicitor's pensive for your birthday gift. If you wouldn't mind, I would like to add a few happy memories to it."

"Thank you, Professor," said Hermione. She carefully set it on a vacant table. Remus extracted a dozen memories and placed them into the gray dish. When he was finished, he said, "Take a look at them later. I'm certain that they'll brighten your day."

"Thanks, Remus," said Harry.

"Are the two of you OK?" he asked cautiously.

Hermione nodded. "We're getting by. The Aurors have been really good to have around."

Remus nodded sadly, and replied, "Sometimes you just have to make the best of a bad situation. I have so much respect for both of you."

“Thanks,” said Hermione. “Have some dinner now. I think Tonks has something for you. We’ll talk more later.”

Amelia stood off to the side, visiting with Jamie Church. “How are they holding up?” she asked.

Jamie said, “Mr. Potter seems to have taken the whole thing in stride easier than Hermione. I’ve seen her several times outside late evenings, crying when she’s alone.”

Bones replied, “Maybe she’s being healthier about it. Harry seems to keep everything bottled up. I hope they at least talk with each other. The Doctors seem to be very nurturing parents.”

Jamie nodded in agreement. “They’re leaving for southern France for three weeks on holiday tomorrow. They made arrangements to put Tonks and I up in large beachside villa with them.”

Bones replied, “That’s very accommodating.” In reality, Emma had discussed the arrangements with her a few days earlier.

Jamie continued, “I think Dan is behind it. Either he views Harry as a possible future son-in-law, or sees him as the son that he never had. Either way, Harry seems to spend almost as much time with him as with Hermione. They play golf together twice a week.”

Bones nodded and replied, “He has to be a healthier father figure than that terrible man that Harry was stuck with for fifteen years. His solution to most situations was to degrade Harry, or treat him like some sort of unwelcome house elf.”

Harry walked up and greeted both women. “Hello Minister, Senior Auror Church.”

“Hi Harry. Happy birthday,” replied both women at once. “Did you have a good day?”

“Brilliant,” replied Harry. “We went swimming in the morning, had lunch, then we went to Gringotts. Hermione and Emma seem to enjoy the cart rides a lot. We found some books at the bookstore, then arrived here. It’s been a fun day, and I’m having a fantastic evening. I got a new pensive, and people are leaving me copies of happy memories.”

Bones smiled at him and said, “Harry, that’s wonderful. I’ll make a contribution for you, too. It’s good to finally see you in a social setting.”

Harry smiled back and replied, “Thank you both for coming today. You both have done so much for me this summer. I can’t begin to express my gratitude.”

Church replied, “We should be the ones thanking you, dear. Your other guests are looking for you. Enjoy your evening.”

Harry looked over by the pool and saw Ron visiting with Lavender. They seemed to be enjoying each other’s company. Ron was now 6’2 and was making the most of the publicity that he had received from the battle at the Department of Mysteries. He seemed to have taken clear notice of Lavender’s curves. Lavender seemed to be hanging onto his every word as well as to Ron himself. Both seemed happy with the arrangement.

Ginny seemed rather interested in Neville. Emma watched with Hermione as they came up and greeted Harry. Neville carried himself with more personal pride and self-confidence than the previous year. He showed Harry his new wand with obvious pride.

Emma commented to Hermione, “You seem to have made a nice group of friends at school dear. I’m very happy for you.”

“Thanks mum.” Hermione knew that her mum was being sincere and gave her a hug. “I feel like I finally fit in.” As an afterthought she added, “I really get along great with Harry.”

Emma gave her daughter a squeeze on the shoulder and replied, "We love him too, dear. We're glad that the two of you are happy together."

Harry and Hermione met up with Lee Jordan. Brushing his dreadlocks back Lee said, "We're sorry that you and Hermione were attacked, and we feel bad that you had to do terrible things to defend yourself, but we're not sorry to be rid of Malfoy and Snape. Everyone here feels the same way."

Harry looked around, noticed that almost everyone there was watching him, and they silently nodded at him. George added, "Putting whatever he may have done to help Dumbledore aside, Snape terrorized an entire generation of students at Hogwarts. Next term might be the best year that Neville will ever have at school."

Lee added, "Who knows how much information Malfoy passed on to the Death Eaters? We just wanted to let you know that we are behind you two and wanted to express our appreciation. Cheers mate," he said as the four of them chinked their butterbeer bottles together.

Meanwhile Amelia found her way to Emma and asked, "How are you holding up Dr. Granger?"

Emma replied, "Things have finally quieted down since the attack. We're leaving on holiday to Nice tomorrow like we talked about. I'm so pleased that Harry has been staying with us for the summer. Having him with us has been very good for Hermione – for all of us, really. She's finally had her nose out of books a bit and has spent some time outside relaxing. Harry's had dinner on the table every evening when we get home from the surgery, and Dan isn't pestering me to play yet another round of golf with him. The two of them love it, but I think it's dreadful. I imagine that Harry has had a better life as well. I can't imagine how child protection services never got wind of the way that he was being treated all those years."

Amelia nodded and replied, "I'm glad to hear that the last few weeks have been better. People have been failing to protect Harry since he was fifteen months old. I hope that trend has been reversed of late."

Emma asked, "What happened to those men who were arrested a month ago?"

Amelia replied, "They have been charged with a dozen or more crimes each and are awaiting trial. We have made some staffing changes within the wizarding prison system recently. I have asked the goblins to assume responsibility for guarding the main prison. It will cost the community more to provide that service, but I believe it will provide a more secure environment. As such, Harry and Hermione will be asked to appear in court as witness sometime the last two weeks of August. We will try and schedule the hearing regarding the attack on your family at the same time."

Emma thought about her words for a moment and asked, "Do Hermione and Harry know about this? How will they get there?"

Amelia replied, "They will by the end of the evening. I'll provide a portkey to get them there and back. You and Dr. Granger will be invited to attend if you wish. The investigation regarding the death of Severus Snape has not been completed yet." She didn't volunteer any additional information on the matter, and Emma wasn't certain what to ask. She knew that the teens weren't being held responsible and that their actions were viewed purely as defensive, but didn't know what else the man might have been involved in, or that someone else may have been responsible for his death.

Harry found Amelia again, and he asked her a question. "Minister Bones, have you ever heard of a wizard's oath made to keep someone from going to Azkaban?"

She thought about his question for a moment, decided to see where he was going with it and replied, "Yes. Go on."

Harry said, "It's pretty common knowledge that Snape was spying. You can draw your own conclusions as to who he was spying for, or maybe he was working for both sides at once. I suppose we'll never get a chance to have Riddle and Dumbledore sit down for tea and ask them properly. Neither one of them would have wanted to see Snape take the stand under veritaserum, or be sent to Azkaban. Maybe Snape was terrified about spending the rest of his years in Azkaban, or he didn't want to be kissed like Barty Crouch Jr."

Bones had similar thoughts and Harry was probably as safe a person to discuss them with as any. She flicked her wand and created a ring of silence around them. "So you're suggesting that Snape didn't succumb to the wounds from the night before or the effects of the blood restorative potion, rather that he was assisted out of the world by means of someone acting to fulfill a previously made pledge. Is that correct?"

Harry nodded and replied, "I'm not so much suggesting it, as asking if it is a realistic possibility?"

Bones replied, "At this point, I would say that it's the most likely scenario. Why are you asking me, rather than Director Hammer?"

Harry considered his words for a moment and replied, "I'm wondering if it would be better to let the matter drop. If it was one of Riddle's people who did it, the world is minus one Death Eater and there is one less Death Eater spying against the light side. If it was someone from the Order, do we really want to know about it?"

Bones said nothing for a moment to see if Harry was really finished.

Harry continued, "Hermione is living with the belief that she took a man's life, as I'm living with the knowledge that I did. Maybe she did. Maybe she didn't. There could be a pretty severe cost in finding out. That's why I'm having this conversation with you rather than Director Hammer. Does that make sense?"

Bones thought about what Harry said. The fact that he said it implied the likelihood that someone else may have had a similar conversation with him. She asked, "How is Hermione holding up?"

Harry thought for a moment and said, "One minute, we were skinny dipping in the pool being kids, and the next minute we were in a war fighting to save our family. Nothing is going to undo that. Malfoy and Snape killed a good man and changed lives forever. The dead got buried. The survivors get to fight another day."

Harry continued, "She cries about it, but not necessarily over Snape. We're not normal kids who get to think about shopping malls and video games. That's just the way it is. We'll be OK."

While she wasn't happy with the event, Amelia decided that Harry's words regarding Snape made sense. While she wasn't going to halt the investigation regarding why Snape was there attacking the Grangers in the first place, she agreed with Harry regarding his actual death – there was more to lose than gain. She patted his shoulder and replied, "Take good care of each other Harry. You and Hermione are good for each other. I hope you both have a great holiday. I'll contact you both in a week about court dates for the different Death Eater trials that you may need to serve as a witness with. I'll make you the necessary portkeys. Go have fun with your friends, and thank you for everything. Your parents would be very proud of the person that you have come to be."

"Thank you Minister."

Arthur and Dan were having a great time together. Dan seemed as every bit as interested in magical things as Arthur was in muggle things. They discussed telephones, broomsticks, the tubes, magically expanded trunks, careers in both worlds and their children. Dan had previously heard about Charlie the dragonkeeper, and the magic joke shop, but was equally interested in Bill's work as a curse-breaker. Arthur was spellbound as Dan showed him his video camera and brought the video tape back inside. A minute later they were watching a scene from the party. Arthur was amazed that anything could have both batteries and a plug. For him it was a dream come true. Both men appreciated the learning experience.

Hermione spent a few minutes visiting with Neville. He carefully asked her if she had recovered both from her injuries from the DoM as well as a delicately worded inquiry regarding the attack at her home. She did her best to put him at ease for asking, but admitted to feeling different about school and her acceptance within the wizarding world since the attack.

Neville asked Hermione about her relationship with Harry, and admitted to having feelings about Ginny. Hermione gave him a hug, and encouraged him to act on his feelings, assuring him that Ginny probably felt the same way about him.

"Thanks Hermione," replied Neville. "I always feel better after talking with you."

Hermione smiled at him and replied, "You're welcome Neville."

Neville smiled back and said, "I wanted to thank you and Harry for the swell wrist wand holder, and remembering my birthday. It fits my new wand perfectly."

Hermione replied, "That's good. Here's another butterbeer to bring to Ginny. It was good to visit with you again. We'll spend more time together in a few weeks."

Neville smiled at the witch who had made his life within Gryffindor so much easier and had helped him with his schoolwork countless times. "Thanks Hermione. Do you think you and Harry will run the DA club again this next term?"

Hermione thought for a moment and said, "I'm not certain. I don't know if Harry has talked with Professor Dumbledore about it. I hope so. I think a lot of people learned a lot last term. I know I did."

Neville nodded in agreement and said, "Me too."

"I'll talk with him and let you know."

“Thanks again.”

Minerva met up with Harry after dinner. She had taken the time to observe the Grangers, Hermione, and Harry. He looked as healthy as she had ever seen him. He was obviously well fed, tanned, and most important in her mind, he had a smile on his face. She had so rarely seen Harry happy of late. The last time that came to mind was after the first task of the Tri-Wizard tournament. It was equally obvious that the Grangers were happy having him stay with them. The knowledge put a smile on her normally reserved face.

“Hello Professor. Thank you for coming this evening.”

“Hello, Harry. I’m glad to see you looking so good.”

“The last few weeks have been good. Hermione’s Dad, Dan and I have been playing golf a few times. I like spending time with him. He’s easy to talk with. Hermione taught me how to swim, and I’ve had fun taking Hermione’s mum, Emma to Gringotts to see the dragons.”

Minerva smiled. She’d never seen the fabled Gringotts dragons, let alone been given a tour of them. She realized that the rumors regarding Harry’s wealth must be true. After the hideous year that he’d faced at Hogwarts, she couldn’t be happier for him. “I am delighted that your holiday has been going better.” A moment after saying it, she regretted her words. In reality, Harry had seen or been affected by six deaths in a month. “I meant to say...”

Harry felt her embarrassment and quickly let her off the hook. “I know. Thank you Professor.”

“Harry, I wanted to talk with you about Quidditch. It has come to my attention that the new Director of Magical Games has...”

“Holly Bruce talked with me. Professor, but I don’t think that I’ll be playing Quidditch this term. I expect that I’ll be taking other lessons instead. I think Ron would make an excellent team captain.”

“Harry, are you certain?”

“Yes on both. I can’t justify spending countless hours practicing quaffle passing with Riddle after me, and Ron has been living and breathing Quidditch strategy for years.”

“I understand your reasoning, and I have to say that I agree. You did deserve the opportunity to make your own decision, and I respect it. On a different note, Remus mentioned that you had received a pensive. I have a very happy memory that I would be delighted to share with you.”

“Thank you Professor. It’s on the table, over by Dan Granger.”

“Happy birthday, Harry.”

Harry and Hermione thanked Amelia again. She had made the arrangements to have the portkeys made as well as the exception permit so everyone could leave Harry with a happy memory for his pensive. She replied, “It was my pleasure Hermione and Harry. Susan and I want to thank you again for inviting us. It was great to get out of the house and just be able to relax for an evening. Dinner was excellent. I wish you all the best time on your holiday. I’ll see you again in a few weeks.”

After the guests had left, Harry and Hermione helped with the cleanup. Given that they could use magic, it took a surprisingly short amount of time. Harry thanked Dan, Emma and Hermione at least a dozen times each for arranging such a splendid party. Dan replied, “We’re glad that we could help you celebrate Harry. We had just as much fun as anyone there. Did you get some clever gifts from people?”

“The best,” replied Harry. “I received some things today that I never dreamed I would have.”

Not knowing anything about pensive, Dan gave a puzzled look.

Seeing his confusion, Harry responded, "I met my parents today, if even for a bit."

Dan was bewildered at Harry's words and asked, "But how?"

Harry smiled at the man who had shown him so much kindness and simply replied, "Magic. Thanks again for a great party, Dan. I really appreciate it."

Dan patted the young wizard on the shoulder and replied, "I know. We have a busy day tomorrow. Goodnight Harry."

A/N

How comfortable would Harry be with his wealth?

Paffy's Behind Blue Eyes 2095661 is an interesting story.

Chapter 13

Harry awoke at 5:00 the next morning. He was so excited. He had never been included on a holiday before. The Dursleys hadn't gone that many places when he was younger, and had invariably palmed him off with Aunt Marge or Mrs. Figg when they had gone places. They had never thought to include him as a member of their family.

As such, he had never been to an airport, and he certainly had never held an airline ticket in his hand – Let alone an airline ticket that had his name printed on it. Hermione could sense his excitement as they carried their bags out to the cab. Emma had purchased matching duffle bags for Harry and Hermione a few days before. They had shrunk most of their clothing and books as well as charmed the bags so they only weighed a few pounds each. Hermione charmed the titles of the books to appear to be ordinary school books in the event that they were inspected at customs. Tonks agreed to meet them at the gate at Heathrow airport. She and Jamie Church would be staying with the Grangers in Nice. Tonks agreed to fly on the airliner with them. Church would apparate and meet them at the rented villa later that afternoon.

Harry had become somewhat embarrassed over the extent of his wealth. He had offered several times to pay for the entire trip. Dan refused, as they had invited him to stay as their guest, but allowed him to at least cover the costs associated with the bodyguards. Both men felt that they hadn't done enough, but a compromise had been struck.

Once in the back of the big cab, Tonks cast a silencing charm over them and said, "Give me your wands. I won't be searched at security." She was wearing a gray businesswoman's suit and had a pageboy length blonde cut

"Why not?" asked Hermione.

"I'd flash them my badge. Ultimately, I work for Her Majesty in the British Secret Service. I'm on protective detail."

"But?" asked Harry.

"We have our own budgets and the Minister takes care of 99 percent of the issues, but we're all Brits."

"Makes sense," quipped Dan. "Everybody pays taxes."

Tonks continued, "Harry, this isn't about Dumbledore or the Order. The Minister of Magic has decided that I need to travel with the four of you to the beaches of Nice for three weeks for your own protection. If I need to, I'll do my part."

Hermione and Emma had smirks on their faces, but Harry was nonplused.

She concluded, saying, "Jamie would do the same if needed."

Hermione looked at Harry, and realized that the conversation had two meanings. She whispered something to Tonks, and the smile left her face. Tonks said, "I'm sure that you'll have a great time and enjoy the scenery. It's a lovely place. Nothing bad will happen, and no one knows that you're there."

Harry had a faraway look on his face. They were in a war, and he was going on three weeks R & R, but the war wouldn't stop while they were gone.

The cabbie let them off at Heathrow. Harry was amazed. It was huge! Dan and Emma led the way as Harry gawked in amazement. They got to the ticket counter to check their bags. The agent asked Harry where he was going.

"With them," was all he could stammer out.

"Passport."

"Yes. I have one."

The ticket agent smiled indulgently, "May I see it please?"

Slightly embarrassed, Harry replied, "Here you go."

“How many bags?”

“Sorry. One bag.” Hermione had rehearsed all of this with him a few days ago.

“Here is your baggage claim ticket. Thank you Mr. Potter. Enjoy your flight.” She handed Harry his ticket, baggage claim and his passport back. Harry watched in amazement as his bag zoomed down the conveyor belt.

“Cheers.”

Hermione took his hand. “You’ll have so much fun, Harry.”

“I’m having a fun time right now,” he replied, smiling at his best friend. “How many times have you been here?”

“A few. Mum and Dad took me someplace almost every winter and summer holiday. I wish that you had been able to come with,” she said, squeezing his hand.

“I like going places with you. This is fun.” They all walked to the gate and sat down by the window. Harry was amazed at the number of jets and how big they were up close. He watched with interest as they backed away from the gates and wheeled down the taxiway. Dan explained that amazingly, a jetliner can take off with a greater maximum weight than would be safe to land with.

Tonks had been to the airport once before, but had never been on an airliner either. She sat by Harry and the others watching out the windows spellbound as the jets took off and landed.

The gate agent called for pre-boarding and Dan and Emma got up. Dan said, “We’re in 1A and B. Hermione and Harry are in 1C and D. Tonks you are in 2D.”

Seeing the blank look on their faces, Emma said, “We’re in the first row. Harry, you have the seat by the window on the left side as you

walk in. Hermione will be next to you in the isle seat. Tonks, you will be in the second row right behind Harry. Let's get on now."

"Thank you," Tonks and Harry said together. As they were walking down the jetway, Tonks tripped and stumbled into Harry and Hermione. "Sorry," she whispered, as Emma quietly sniggered.

They found their very comfortable seats and were amazed as the flight attendant asked them what they'd like to drink. "Orange juice for us, please," replied Hermione. "How high have you flown?" whispered Hermione to Harry as they were started rolling down the runway.

"I suppose a thousand feet or so," replied Harry.

"You're going to love this, Harry," she said, squeezing his hand. True to her word, the jetliner lifted off, and Harry's gaze was fixed to the window. Harry soon realized that there is a big difference in the view between one thousand and twenty thousand feet.

During the short flight, the only word to come out of either his or Tonk's mouth was, "Wow!" All too soon, the jetliner was positioned to land. As they were getting off, Harry told the flight attendant, "That was brilliant! Thanks for the ride."

They found their luggage at the carousal and cleared customs. Harry was amazed to learn that Hermione and Emma both spoke perfect French. They went to the hire car booth and soon were on their way. The villa was about two miles from the beaches in a quieter area. It was a five bedroom, tan, stucco home. In the back was a rectangular pool, a shaded porch outdoor eating area and was fenced in for privacy. The country kitchen had a large rectangular scrubbed wood table. Four of the bedrooms and a bathroom were upstairs while the other bedroom and bath was on the main level. Each had a large window and a lovely view.

Harry and Hermione chose rooms at one end of the hall, the Grangers and Tonks chose the rooms at the other. In the middle were the stairs and the bathroom. Church was in the room on the first floor.

After settling in, Tonks gave the teens their wands back. Hermione wore hers in her wrist holder, as did Harry. It wasn't apparent where Tonks had kept hers as she was wearing shorts and a sleeveless top. They drove to the beach area, parked and walked along the promenade until they found an outdoor café for lunch. Jamie, Hermione and her mum ordered bouillabaisse, a sort of fish soup while Tonks, Dan and Harry ordered burgers and crisps. The food was very good.

Afterward they continued walking along the Promenade, a sort of wide sidewalk at the edge of the beach break. Stretching several miles, it offered a view of the beach, people watching, and the sights and sounds of the area. Dan and Emma were first, Harry and Hermione walked along next, holding hands, while Tonks and Church followed, eyes carefully watching people as they walked along.

Harry was mesmerized by the sights of the ocean, the sound of the surf, sea gulls flying and the beach itself. There were hundreds of sunbathers on blankets along the pebble beach or in the warm water. Girls were wearing bikinis, or... Harry nearly stumbled. "See something interesting, Harry?" Tonks asked, smiling at him.

Regaining some semblance of composure, Harry began looking at the shops on the other side of the walkway. Hermione squeezed his hand, knowing that his heart belonged to her. She whispered in his ear, "Don't be embarrassed Harry. The ocean and the beach are very interesting. People watching is a lot of fun."

Harry stammered, "But those girls didn't have..."

"I know," she smiled. "That's the local custom for the young women."

"But..."

"Have a look, Harry."

"But..."

She squeezed his hand and said, "They won't bite Harry. Besides if we go to the beach tomorrow, I wouldn't want you to pass out from embarrassment or anything."

"But..."

"They're not all topless, Harry. People can wear what they're comfortable with." She squeezed his hand again. "The world's an interesting place, Harry. I'm glad to be here, with you."

"Me too," he replied, squeezing her hand back.

They walked to the end of the promenade, then they went inward, looking past hundreds of inviting shops, pubs, sidewalk, cafes, and restaurants. Signs along the way advertised day tours of castles, fishing excursions, golf, whale watching, scuba diving lessons, beach rentals and the like.

Harry remembered hearing the Dursleys come back from weekend holidays to Brighton or other beach areas in Britain and imagined them to be similar. They had never included him. He realized that it probably hadn't been the money; they just hadn't wanted to include him in anything.

"Harry? Are you OK?" asked Hermione, squeezing his hand again.

"I was just wondering about some of the holiday trips that the Dursleys went on over the years."

"Don't give it a thought," replied Hermione, sensing his mood. "I'll go with you on as many holiday trips to as many places as you could ever want. I love you, Harry Potter," she said a bit louder than she might have intended. Emma and Tonks were smiling.

"Me too."

After dinner, and a bit of shopping for beverages and snacks, they drove back to the villa. Harry helped Dan carry in the bags of beer, wine, cokes, fruit, crisps, coffee and snacks that they had purchased.

They sat outside and watched the sun set behind the hills. It had been a great day.

Jamie and Tonks had agreed to split their shifts beginning at 10:00 and rotate them midway through the three-week holiday. Technically they were assigned to guard Harry. Currently only Bones, Hammer, and Dumbledore knew their exact whereabouts. In the event that they needed to be contacted, they each carried mobile telephones. There was also a mobile telephone at Grimmauld Place. They all had the telephone numbers for Amelia and Hammer pre-programmed if they needed to quickly contact them.

Jamie asked Tonks to take the afternoon shift. She knew that the Grangers would probably spend a lot of time on the beach, and preferred to work during the late evenings. Besides with Tonks' morph abilities, she would fit in better on the beaches with the teens.

At 10:30 the Doctors excused themselves and went to bed. Tonks had left to go check on things in London. Jamie was happily sitting outside enjoying the evening air, leaving Hermione and Harry alone sitting on the very comfortable couch.

Hermione snuggled up to Harry, unbuttoned several buttons on her top, took one of his hands and gently placed it just below her left breast. Harry was about as nervous as a young man could be. He could feel her heart beat, and knew that his own must be pounding.

Harry wasn't the sort of person who would ever take something that hadn't been given to him. As a result, he was extremely cautious. Hermione knew this and loved him for it. She turned slightly. Harry didn't move his hand and she positioned herself so that his immobile hand was touching the bottom of her left breast. She took his hand, in hers and offered him a bit of encouragement, and whispered, "Please hold me, Harry."

Harry might be shy and unassuming, but he was eager to comply with her request. Hermione was surprised – For having done as much work around the garden as he had done, Harry had soft hands and a

gentle touch. Rather than grab her like an orange. Harry held her softly, and if he were cradling a priceless treasure in his hands. In his mind, that was exactly what he was doing.

She kissed his ear, and whispered, "I love you, Harry. Thanks for being a wonderful person to me."

Harry was speechless. He had been invited to hold an angel in his arms and was currently holding the softest, most precious object that he could imagine, and the love of his life was thanking him.

Dumbledore wasn't happy. Despite his best advice, Hermione had insisted on having a large birthday gathering for Harry. He was all but certain that word must have slipped out where the Grangers lived, that Harry had been staying there for the summer, or that the Grangers were on holiday in Nice. He didn't begrudge Harry from living his life, but the more active he was, the harder it was to keep him safe.

Then Harry had made a full frontal inquiry regarding the death of Severus. He had told Harry more than he had wanted to, more than Harry needed to know, more than he wanted to have to explain to Amelia or the new Director, Hammer.

He had done what he could to protect Alastor, but was concerned that the entire affair could unravel and cause the ministry to lose focus of the rapidly growing threat of Riddle.

He was certain that Riddle would learn where to find Harry and launch a full assault on the Grangers the week before school began. Unfortunately he had been specifically prohibited from providing the sort of protection that he was certain that Harry would need.

He would have to think of something.

A/N

If Bones concluded that Dumbledore had prior knowledge of Snape's attack at the Grangers, would she go after him?

Volans' story Honks is a fun read. 2749592

Chapter 14

Dan was sitting outside in the covered veranda in the back garden when he noticed the young Auror pull up a chair. He smiled at her, and said, "Good morning, Tonks. How are you? Can I get you a coffee?"

Tonks was pleased to have been invited to enjoy the lovely weather, rather than sit by herself. "Good morning, Dr. Granger. Please. I'm fine thank you."

"It's Dan, please. I understand that you have known Hermione and Harry for a while now?"

Tonks replied, "Yes sir. I met Harry and your daughter last summer when they were visiting at Mr. Black's home."

Dan looked at the young Auror. Her looks reminded him of the American actress, Meg Ryan, blonde, with a pageboy cut. He realized that he might be seeing her real look or simply the look that she had established for the day.

Anticipating his unspoken question, she replied, "Yes, this is my real look. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to just be myself for a few weeks. Jamie and I wanted to thank you and your family for being so accommodating with us. Most times we have bodyguard duty, we're treated like domestics, or worse."

Dan felt compelled to ask, "Have you ever lost a client?"

Tonks looked him in the eye, and replied, "No sir, and I have no intention of changing that trend with Harry, or your family. He means too much to us, sir."

Dan was puzzled by her words. "What do you mean?"

Tonks sat up straight, sipped her coffee and replied, "Harry's about six years younger than me, so much of what I'm telling you is information that I've heard from others. When Harry was about a year old, Voldemort attacked him and his parents. They were killed, but

Harry did something miraculous that sent Voldemort away for thirteen years. Baby Harry was hit dead on with a killing curse and he lived. Beyond that, the curse bounced off him and hit Voldemort, ending a war. Before that, Voldemort and his follower had murdered hundreds of innocent people. Harry is famous in our world, known as the-boy-who-lived. With Voldemort back, a lot of people are looking to Harry to somehow get rid of Voldemort again.”

Dan replied, “Pardon my asking, but you’re in law enforcement and Harry’s in school. Why not take an army of officers up against Voldemort, or have the military just drop a bomb on his house? Is he human? The British government has snipers that could target him. Why involve Harry?”

“I don’t have an answer to your question, sir. Most magical people never think of non-magical solutions as being valid. I will take those suggestions to my supervisor. They seem reasonable.”

Dan sipped his coffee for a moment and added, “Harry said something about a prophecy.”

Tonks grew ridged and replied, “Sir that is the equivalent of a state secret. I ask that you say nothing more about it to anyone.”

“But...”

“Please sir, people have been killed over that prophecy, and people have gone to prison over it. If you know anything about it, or Harry is in anyway involved with it, please don’t say anything. It’s that important.”

Dan put his cup down and replied, “I’m sorry. I thought you would have known.”

“Please, sir...”

“I’m sorry.”

“No worries, sir. Good morning Hermione. Where’s sleepyhead?”

She smiled at Tonks playful banter and answered, "Still sleeping and dreaming, I suppose."

Tonks winked and said, "Pleasant dreams, I hope."

Hermione nodded, "Lord knows, he's had enough crappy ones. Is there more coffee?"

Tonks handed her a cup, "Right here. Oops. Sorry."

Hermione smiled at her. "Don't worry about it." She went to get a cloth. By the time she came back, Tonks had cleaned up the spill with a spell, and had poured Hermione a fresh cup.

"Thanks."

"My pleasure. What are your plans for the day? Are you going to take Harry back to the beach, or do something else?"

"Mum and I were going to go shopping for new outfits. Would you like to come with?"

"If you go in the morning, I'd love it. I have to stay by Harry in the afternoon."

Dan replied, "I had made tee time reservations for Harry and I at one. Would that work out?"

"Perfect," replied Hermione. "We'll be back in time to go for early lunch together."

"We'll meet up at eleven then," said Dan.

Back at Hogwarts, as she was having breakfast, Minerva was happily remembering Harry's birthday party. She had been delighted to receive the invitation from Hermione. She was delighted to have been included on his short list of friends, happy to have actually spent time with him, and relieved that he held no grudge against her. Most of all,

she'd been pleased that he'd been able to spend some time being a teenager without the weight of the world resting on his shoulders.

She'd witnessed his lightning fast reflexes and was grateful that Fred and Tonks hadn't been on the short end of a tragedy. She'd witnessed that he had the undivided ear of the new Minister of Magic, and realized that in a few short years, he would most likely attain his place of power within the wizarding world.

She rethought her career discussion with him. There weren't many millionaire policemen in the world, probably none who were multi-millionaires. Little did she realize that her estimate of his wealth was only a small fraction of his holdings. She was still angry at Dumbledore for interfering with Harry and manipulating others to do his bidding to control him.

At that moment, she had an epiphany – manipulating others – her, Tonks, Kingsley, Snape, the Grangers. The pieces began falling into place. 'Snape would do anything that Albus suggested without hesitation'. Dumbledore had sent her and Tonks on an errand to go collect Harry from the Grangers, but Bones had put a stop to it.

Dumbledore had sent Kingsley to go find Harry. Kingsley took it a bit too far costing him his position as Senior Auror, and probably the Directorship position that Hammer had been given.

Dumbledore had probably sent Snape to visit the Grangers in that disgusting garb,...and something had gone horribly wrong. 'But why was Malfoy there?' she wondered. He wasn't a full fledged Death Eater yet.

Then it made sense. He was there because he wasn't a Death Eater. Snape had to bring someone along to be convincing. Death Eaters never attacked alone. It hadn't been a sanctioned raid, so Snape didn't want to risk using a real Death Eater and getting found out. So he recruited one of his students, Draco Malfoy to accompany him.

And then something went horribly wrong. They were spotted. No, that didn't make sense. The whole point would to have been seen and

demonstrate the risk to their safety, then for Snape to escape after inflicting some minor property damage.

No, the Malfoy boy must have engaged Michael Wood in a fight, and somehow one or the other killed him. Probably Malfoy, he never could exercise any real finesse. Snape would have simply stunned him and gotten cleanly away.

Except they were seen. Had they left immediately after killing Michael, they would have gotten cleanly away. Draco probably began exercising some sort of bloodlust frenzy. Potter and Hermione were outside, and hadn't been trapped in the house that Malfoy was attempting to burn down. They saw the two Death Eaters and defended their home.

'Albus, what have you done?' There was no way to prove it, but she was certain that each of the pieces fit. She recalled the American President ordering the break in a few years back, and how it unraveled, horribly dividing a nation. There was no paper trail in this case, and the people in the middle were dead.

It probably seemed like a prank at the time, hardly worse than the Malfoy boy and his idiot friends dressing up as dementors to scare Potter, but it had gone horribly wrong.

But what to do about it? He had clearly not stepped up and accepted responsibility for his action, probably rationalizing that it was a greater good situation again. She was certain that she could no longer follow him, she wasn't certain that she was willing to work for him. Should she resign from the Order, or call for his resignation? Clearly they were the right things to do.

But would either action help their struggle against Voldemort? Dumbledore might be destined to defeat him, Potter might, she didn't know for sure. Dividing the light side right now would do them no good.

Perhaps he had an explanation? A hundred years service to the light side certainly would earn him the right to speak on his own behalf.

“Good morning, Minerva.”

Startled, she nearly jumped out of her seat. Regaining her composure, she simply replied, “Albus.”

“What are your plans for the day, Minerva?”

“I wanted to talk with you, if you have the time.”

Dumbledore looked at his pocket watch for a moment and replied, “As it turns out, I do. What shall we talk about?”

Without pausing, Minerva queried, “Who directed that Snape go visit the Grangers that evening?”

Deciding to tell a truth, Dumbledore replied, “I had inquired if Voldemort had any idea where Harry may have been staying after the deaths of Harry’s relatives. Severus replied that Riddle was looking for Harry but had not yet found him. I knew it was but a matter of time until he took up attacking Harry’s friends’ houses. I asked Severus if he would visit the Granger residence to check on the security.

“And?”

“Obviously things went very, very wrong. For some inexplicable reason, Severus invited Malfoy to accompany him, and I’m certain that you are aware of the rest.”

Pushing herself, Minerva asked, “Had you suggested that Snape visit the Granger home in the middle of the night wearing Death Eater garb?”

Smoothly, Dumbledore replied, “No. I made no such suggestion. He said that he would take care of it. Those were the last words that he spoke to me.” In reality, he had specifically requested that Snape wear his Death Eater garb, which implied that he do it at night, but he had never suggested bringing the Malfoy boy or engaging a ministry Hit Wizard in a firefight.

Minerva wasn't sure what to say. His story regarding Snape was too convenient. She could think of no logical reason that Snape would interpret a request of "Why don't you go check up on Harry?" as direction to go out, find an accomplice, and commit murder.

Digging a bit further, she asked, "Why did he interpret your instructions so badly?"

Adjusting his half moon spectacles, Dumbledore replied, "I wish I knew. He had a lifetime of precision when it came to following instructions."

"My point, exactly. Are you going to wait and see if it blows over, or take some proactive action?"

Looking directly at her, Dumbledore asked, "What are you suggesting?"

This was one of the hardest conversations that she had ever been in. She looked at him carefully, took a breath, then replied, "I think you need to tell the Order what really happened, and consider a reorganization. From the moment that term ended, the actions by the members of the Order have been poorly executed, divisive, and have jeopardized lives and careers. Albus, don't let this degrade into a vote of no confidence. Further, I think you owe an apology and an explanation to Harry and the Grangers. You can decide for yourself with respect to the Ministry."

Dumbledore got up to leave. "Thank you for your very candid remarks, Minerva. I shall of course consider your recommendations very carefully. Enjoy your day." He was both hurt by her comments, and impressed that she would find the courage to utter the words to him.

In truth, the Order was in complete disarray. His only surprise was that he hadn't yet received any resignations. The succession of leadership in the Order was obvious to him, but he felt that Harry was a year away from being ready.

Overall Dumbledore was still disappointed in Harry's behavior over the summer holiday. He had exposed himself and others to needless risk.

At the same time, Dumbledore realized that he couldn't expect to Harry to make decisions as if he had a hundred years of perspective to draw from. It had been a long time since he had been sixteen. Dumbledore wasn't sure that he would have done any better himself.

Given that Harry's number one detractor within the Order was gone, maybe the time had come to invite the next generation. He would consult with Alastor tomorrow.

Tonks enjoyed watching Harry and Dan banter back and forth as they made their way around the back nine of the course that they had found. Dan had bought them several beers and their play had loosened up somewhat. Mulligans became the norm, as did improvements to the lay of the ball. Regardless of the slight infractions to the rules as defined by the Royal and Ancient, the two men were having a great time, and obviously enjoyed each other's company.

The course was not long, barely 6,000 yards, so they hit irons from most of the tee boxes. Harry was not a long ball hitter, but had an amazing amount of control for a first year golfer.

Both men had good short games. From 50 yards in, they were nearly a match for each other. As such, playing a short course, proved a significant advantage for Harry. As such, after seventeen holes, with the four strokes a side that Dan had given Harry, they were dead even. The eighteenth hole was a short par four, about 280 yards with a narrow fairway sand bunkers guarding the green.

Dan hit off first with his three iron. He hit the ball 180 yards, but landed to the right of the fairway in the second cut. "You're up," he said to Harry.

Harry pulled his two iron from the bag, teed the ball a bit higher than normal and hit about 160 yards. The ball rolled true and was nearly even with Dan, but in a better position. "Good shot," said, Dan.

"Thanks," replied Harry, knowing that Dan had meant it.

In truth, the second cut would be considered long rough at most courses. Dan played a five iron and swung harder than he liked. The ball carried, but was 30 yards from the pin. He quipped, "I was lucky that I even found it in this mess."

Harry smiled at him. His own ball was sitting well in the short grass. He hit a four iron and to his amazement, was on the back edge of the green. "Excellent," remarked Dan. "You should be able to two put that for a par if you set it up."

"I hope so," replied Harry, less confident of the technique than Dan.

Dan hit his third shot and landed about seven feet from the pin. "Wow," remarked Harry. "You did that really well." Dan smiled, knowing that Harry was being sincere.

Harry took his first put. His goal was to get close to the pin. His stroke was sure. He ended up about two feet away, and marked his ball with a knut. Dan took aim and lipped the cup ending up about two feet away. They each made their last shot, and felt very pleased with themselves. "Good game," remarked Dan.

"You too. Thanks for the great day. Lets go get Hermione and Emma. I'll buy dinner."

"You're on," remarked Dan.

Tonks looked on in wonderment as she followed behind them. She couldn't believe the change in Harry. Gone was the smart mouthed little kid that she had helped escort to Grimmauld place a summer ago. In his place was a young man with a quick wit and a truly charming smile. His eyes could win the heart of any witch that he wanted, yet she was certain that his heart was spoken for. There was no doubt in her mind that every young woman in the French Riviera

could parade in front of him naked and he would only be thinking of Hermione.

Equally important he had found a parent and a friend in Dr. Granger. She respectfully disagreed with Dumbledore. Harry may have been safer locked away in the castle for the summer, but he was having the opportunity to live a life with the Grangers. If what Dr. Granger had let slip was true and the Prophecy did concern Harry, he deserved a shot at life before facing that monster again. He also deserved all of the help that she and the rest of the light side could give him.

When they got back to the villa, Hermione was beside herself, holding up two parchment envelopes. "They're finally here" she squeaked excitedly.

"Open yours first," said Harry. Hermione didn't need to be asked twice. Harry heard a squeak of joy. "I did it," she cried.

"Huh?" asked Harry, guessing the answer, but wanting to give his love the pleasure of saying it.

"Straight Os. Fourteen. I'm so happy."

"You deserve it. You worked so hard. I'm very proud of you."

"Thanks," she said wrapping herself around him, and kissing every part she could see. After a minute she untangled herself from him and said, "Go ahead. Open yours."

Harry did, and to his surprise had also done rather well. He got twelve in total including an extra third owl in Defense! He said "I got 3 Os in Defense and 2 in Charms, 2 Es each in Transfiguration and Potions and an E in Magical Creatures. I also passed Astronomy and Herbology."

Hermione replied, "That's fantastic. What does your second sheet say?"

“Dunno. Take a look.” He handed the envelope to her. Hermione carefully scanned the sheet.

Dear Mr. Potter

Congratulations on your exceptional OWL results. You have received the highest score ever recorded in Defense. You are eligible to take the following classes:

NEWT level

Defense

Transfiguration

Charms

Potions

Herbology

Practical level

Runes

Arithmancy

Healing

Muggle Studies

Home Management

Best wishes,

Griselda Marchbanks

Director Magical Examinations Board

Hermione said, "There's also a third sheet."

Dear Mr. Potter

Congratulations on your fine examination results. In addition the topics listed, I would like to offer you the opportunity to be tutored in the following topics:

Occlumency

Asset Management

Auror level dueling

Apparition

Specialized transfiguration

The additional fees for the other topics will be quite manageable. As such, I would recommend that you consider the following topics and activities:

Newt level

Transfiguration

Charms

Asset Management

Occlumency

Apparition

Auror Level Dueling

Elective – Up to one other class of your choosing.

I would also ask you to consider leading your wonderful Defense practice group, under the sanction of an authorized school club.

Sincerely

Albus Dumbledore

“What does yours say?” asked Harry.

“Will you read them for me?” asked Hermione. She handed Harry the pages.

Dear Miss Granger,

Congratulations on your outstanding test results. They are reflective of the hard work that each of your professors indicated that you put forth.

You are eligible to take any course that Hogwarts offers including:

NEWT Level

Transfiguration

Charms

Defense

Potions

Runes

Arithmancy

Practical level

Runes

Arithmancy

Healing

Muggle Studies

Home Management

Best wishes,

Griselda Marchbanks

Director Magical Examinations Board

"There's also a third sheet inviting you to be a sixth year prefect and a prefect badge. Congratulations. You should go show Dan and Emma."

"Show us what?" asked Emma.

"Your brilliant, beautiful daughter's fantastic test results," remarked Harry with obvious love and admiration.

Emma looked at them first then handed them to Dan. She said, "Hermione, that is really fantastic. Professor McGonagall indicated that on average not more than one student in fifty years runs the table like you did with all Os. Congratulations. Dan and I know how hard you have worked for this, and how much it means to you. We'd hug and kiss you, but it would probably mean more coming from Harry." She smiled at Harry and asked, "How did you do, dear?"

"Brilliant," replied Hermione. "Harry got twelve Os including the highest score ever recorded on one of the subjects."

In it's own light, Dan thought that Harry's result was equivalent to Hermione's. He asked, "How long have they been keeping the scores?"

"Over six hundred years," replied Hermione. That's the best score of over twenty thousand students.

Harry hoped it would be good enough.

After lunch they went to the beach in front of the Promenade. Rather than use towels on the pebble beach, they rented loungers. It was fantastic. The sky was cloudless, and the water was so blue.

Hermione and Tonks took Harry up to the edge of the water. Harry was amazed. He had never seen the ocean before that week. The immensity was almost overwhelming. Hermione had previously explained that the water in the Mediterranean was typically warmer than the Atlantic. He walked into the water a few feet. Not as warm as the Granger's heated pool, he felt the water rushing against his shins then back again with the waves. It felt remarkable.

"We don't have to go out any farther than you want to," said Hermione, knowing that Harry was still new to swimming.

Tonks was confused. She had seen Harry dive into a lake two years ago, swim with the merpeople and bring his friend Ron and a little girl out of a deep lake. Was Hermione implying that he barely knew how to swim?

They waded out farther until the water was chest high. Harry felt strangely buoyant in the water. The specific gravity of salt water had not been covered in the primary school that he had attended, but he knew that he could easily float in this water, whereas he always had to keep moving in the pool. He looked over at the two women, smiled and said, "This is great!"

Sensing that things were OK, Tonks paddled a bit away to give them some space together. Like little seals, they swam around each other, first a bit apart, then back together again holding each other's arm for support.

After they had swum and clung and floated and nuzzled, they found Tonks and kept her company for a bit before going back in.

"How's the water?" asked Emma, who'd had fun watching them together.

“Brilliant!” replied Harry. “It was easier to float than the pool and I could feel the power of the sea.”

“See any mermaids?” quipped Dan.

Harry looked over at him with a confused look on his face. “Are there merpeople around here?” he asked.

This time it was Dan who had a confused look. Hermione smiled at the situation and replied, “Dad, there really are mermaids and mermen. Harry has swum with them.”

Dan nodded and muttered, “This is like dragons. Isn’t it? Everybody gets to see them but me.”

Emma patted his shoulder and replied, “Sorry, dear.”

Harry smiled, and said, “I’ll ask the goblins to show you the dragons next time we go to Gringotts. You wouldn’t want to meet one out in the wild.”

Dan smiled at the teen that he had come to love and replied, “Thanks.” He thought about the comment that Harry had made, and realized that he was right. Perhaps I should be careful what I wish for, he thought to himself.

After they left the beach, they changed clothing and walked around the walkway for a while and had a quiet dinner. Jamie had met up with them they told her about their day.

When they had got back to the Villa, Hermione found Harry and they sat out by the pool together in the fading light. Hermione said, “When mum and I were out shopping, I found a wizarding shop. I bought us something that we can try.”

“What’s that?” asked Harry, hoping that she hadn’t found the French version of the Weasley joke shop.

With a wicked smile on her face, she replied, "Gillyweed. The water is so warm and clear here, I bet it would be fantastic to try. Maybe you could rescue me again."

Harry smiled back, and said, "I'd be very willing to try. What did you have in mind?"

"There's the Neptune beach few miles away. It's supposed to be less crowded and we could go there tomorrow if you'd like. It has a reef so we would probably see some fish."

"It sounds like you've done your homework. Should we go early or sleep in?"

Having anticipated his question, Hermione replied, "Early I think."

Harry thought the whole idea sounded great. He asked, "Do you think Tonks would come with us?"

Hermione nodded and replied, "We could get mum to take us about eight. I think she'd appreciate being asked."

"Did you get enough for everyone?"

Hermione nodded an affirmation, and said, "It was very reasonably priced. How much did you take in the lake?"

"Dobby gave me a hunk about the size of a golf ball. It lasted about an hour. It hurt for about a minute at the beginning and end, but I could see better and swim much easier in addition to breathing under water. It took about a minute to work."

Comparing Harry's answer to what she had purchased, Hermione declared, "I probably have enough for six uses."

Harry replied, "You'll like it. The Hogwarts lake was really deep, dark and cold. I went in February. You must have froze being at the bottom of the lake that long. Could you see anything?"

Hermione shook her head and replied, "Not a thing. We were asleep the entire time. I don't even remember going into the water. This will be great."

With a darker look on his face, Harry asked, "Did anyone in the shop recognize you?"

Sure of herself on this issue, Hermione replied, "No. I just showed the shopkeeper my wand. He didn't ask my name or anything. I paid him two Galleons, and left right after."

"Good. That was a great idea to get some. We'll have a lot of fun. Maybe I'll see a mermaid like the one in the prefect bathroom."

She kissed him on the cheek. "Who knows what you'll see under the water, Mr. Potter. She gave him another hug and whispered, "Good night, Harry. Thanks for a wonderful day."

Back at number 12 Grimmauld Place, Dumbledore called the meeting to order. "Good evening. Thank you for coming on short notice. I have a few announcements to make."

.-.-

A/N

Things are starting to unravel for Dumbledore.

Could Gillyweed work on Dan or Emma?

Could the court impound all of the Malfoy money? Would Gringotts honor the court order, if issued?

ColorofAngles' story Life happens is interesting. 2375816

Chapter 15

Dumbledore looked out at the attendees of the Order meeting. How many would understand if they knew the truth? He was reminded of a line from a muggle film that he had recently seen.

He began, and everyone listened in silence. “Nearly a month ago a series of events took place, each directly or indirectly affecting members of the Order and Harry Potter. They began when Harry’s Uncle took it upon himself to pick a fight with Harry.”

Moody stood up. “Excuse me Dumbledore, but if this is the meeting to come clean about what’s happened in the last month, we’d best all do that. Prior to Dursley’s conversation with Potter, a few of us who are here tonight had taken it upon ourselves to bait him a bit. Led by myself, we made a fair amount of threatening remarks to him regarding treating Potter decently, and then we left.”

“That is precisely my point, Alastor. In spite of our best intentions, many things went badly. I too have made many mistakes this last month. I took it upon myself to presume that I alone knew what was best for Harry regarding his welfare, and made requests of many of you. It has been pointed out to me that by having what could fairly be described as a blinded concern for Harry’s safety, I have repeatedly disregarded his right of choice.”

Amelia and a dozen or so members thought to themselves, Spot on, Dumbledore.

He continued. “To this day, I believe that some of his decisions were wrong. I believe that he knowingly placed the Grangers in additional risk, by electing to stay with them. I believe that at this moment, he would be safer staying here or at the castle. I believe that he could be studying new skills.”

He could see the look of disagreement on many of their faces. “Yet, I recognize that he is barely sixteen and has the weight of the world on his shoulders, and I can not honestly say that I would have made wiser decisions at age sixteen or age twenty six myself. I also realize that having a hundred and fifty years of perspective does not

automatically make me right, nor does it give me the right to make decisions for others without their consent.”

There were nods of obvious agreement at those conciliatory words. He continued. “Having said that I must apologize for a handful of decisions that I have made in the last month that I wish I could take back. In making these decisions, I realize that I have damaged many longstanding relationships and trusts. I requested that Miss Tonks and Minerva visit Harry at the Grangers and insist that he leave there for a safer location.”

Arthur was feeling guilty, having told Dumbledore that Harry was staying at the Grangers, knowing that the resulting confrontations had caused many hard feelings. He remained silent.

Dumbledore continued. “I requested that Kingsley use every available means to find Harry. Kingsley did not misinterpret my request and searched the Granger residence for any evidence that Harry may have recently been there, or might still be there.”

Kingsley stood up, and said, “Professor Dumbledore, you didn’t direct me to break or stretch any laws. I could have gone and gotten the paperwork to make an official search of the premises. I took a shortcut, and I accept what happened without regret.”

Dumbledore nodded in appreciation, but replied, “Perhaps, but I could have issued you the appropriate legal paperwork in advance, but neglected to. I offer you my sincere apology.”

Kingsley said, “It’s not needed, but I accept it.”

Minerva was still angry. ‘Yes, Dumbledore should be making apologies to the Order, but he never made one to the Grangers, or to Wood’s parents.’ She waited silently to see where he was taking the conversation.

Dumbledore replied, “Thank you, Kingsley. I had also made a request of Severus. After Harry had been at the Grangers for several days, I asked Severus to go and check on the security that had been established for Harry’s safety. I could have simply asked Amelia, or I

could have risked her wrath and gone to see for myself, but I didn't. I asked Severus."

He continued, "For reasons that we may never know, he invited Draco Malfoy to accompany him. Unable to maintain stealth, or discipline, the two of them were discovered, and engaged in a firefight with a very good man, Michael Wood, who was faithfully guarding Harry and the Grangers. One or the other of the intruders killed Michael. There is good reason to believe that it was Malfoy who did it, but the fact remains that a good man was murdered due to an event that I helped initiate."

There was absolute silence in the room. Taken at his word, Dumbledore had done little wrong, but a simple plan had gone horribly wrong. Minerva wasn't positive that he had told the whole truth, but remained silent.

He continued. "To make matters worse, Malfoy and Snape then proceeded to seal the Granger residence and attempt to murder all of the residents by torching the house like the Death Eaters had done to the Dursley residence days earlier. Whether Severus did those actions of his own free will, or was simply drawn in by the moment, we shall never know, but at that moment, he was helping commit murder."

This time there were audible sounds of distress. Molly openly wept as did Tonks who had arrived immediately before the start of the meeting. Severus had no real friends within the Order, but at Dumbledore's urging they had accepted him, and minimally respected the role that he had played.

Dumbledore concluded. "As it turned out Harry and Miss Granger were enjoying a midnight swim, and saw the two men dressed in Death Eater garb attempting to torch their home. With remarkable presence of mind, Harry engineered a counter-attack and put an end to the attack. Directly or indirectly three people are dead."

Lupin had not heard the words that he'd expected. Sirius had been wronged, Minerva had been wronged, Snape had been directed badly, Michael had been murdered, Tonks and Kingsley had been wronged, and the Dursleys had been wronged. Each of them may have made mistakes along the way, but Dumbledore had set each of them in motion.

'What about Harry? What about the Grangers?' Their rights had been repeatedly violated. A simple utterance of "Oops. Sorry about that," didn't seem sufficient. He had no doubt that Sirius had been set off due to hearing that Harry had been taken away from his rightful custody.

The more Dumbledore offered forgiveness to everyone else, the more Remus questioned Dumbledore's leadership. Keeping Harry in the dark, keeping Harry locked up at the Dursleys, and keeping Sirius locked up felt like a nearly unbroken series of bad leadership decisions.

As Amelia sat and listened to Dumbledore, she increasingly felt that his story was not so much a bald faced lie as a canard filled with half-truths, slanted perspectives and omissions. She concluded that regarding the event that originally set off the Dursleys and conclude with their deaths, neither the Order, nor Potter, nor the Dursleys were lily white. She was certain that the five had had honorable intentions in their threatening discussion with Vernon Dursley.

She was equally positive that neither Potter, nor Dursley were willing to back down that afternoon, and they simply parted ways in anger. Neither the Order, nor Potter had considered that the protective wards would have failed so quickly, or that the Dursleys would have ignored repeated warnings to vacate the premises when Tonks had come to the conclusion that they were in imminent danger.

There had been no inference in that part of the discussion that Dumbledore had initiated the confrontation. If she pressed on the matter, Molly Weasley would probably admit to having pushed Arthur to go and talk with them, and the others just went with him for support.

Tonks had already been disciplined over that issue as she had been working at the time of the discussion, but the others went as individuals.

She agreed that Dumbledore had made mistakes. From her perspective, except for his astonishing battle against Voldemort in June, Dumbledore appeared to have attained a virtually unbroken string of marginal decisions in the last year. Granted, Fudge with his assignment of Umbridge had doubtless been a major distraction, but he clearly had not been as crisp as she would have hoped. Yet she could honestly admit that until the last two weeks, the ministry had done nothing constructive to fight Voldemort or his followers.

Hestia Jones sat listening to Dumbledore's words. Fifteen years as an investigative Auror had honed her ear to differentiate from a person telling the whole truth, a truth, a small lie, or a whopper. She was not happy with what she was hearing and decided that the time had come to do something about it.

She stood to speak. "Professor, I believe that you have consistently elected to be less than complete with us. Time and time again we have committed our spare time, risked our careers and our lives to follow your decisions. None of us expect that things would always have gone perfectly, but you have not been forthright with us."

There were several nods of agreement as she continued. "I feel like we are fighting he-who-must-not-be-named and are being led by he-who-must-not-be-blamed. I must in all good conscious, resign from the Order. Sir, I whole heartedly support the cause, but I cannot abide by your leadership. I'm sorry. Goodbye." She turned around to leave.

Dumbledore knew that the time had come for full disclosure. "I appreciate your many contributions, Hestia and believe that the time has come to fully disclose the seeming madness to my methods. Prior to do so, I must ask you once again to sign a wizard's oath of non-disclosure. The information that I'm willing to share with each of you is that secret and that important. Hestia, you and the others are welcome to stay, or leave as you will. I shall call a recess for five

minutes.” He turned and walked into the kitchen not knowing if anyone would be there when he returned.

Amelia followed him. When she found him in the kitchen having a cup of hot chocolate, she flicked her wand creating a wall of silence. She sat across from him and said, “Dumbledore, I came here tonight to verify that you were either disbanding your private army or turning the leadership over to someone else, and now you spring this. I won’t say anything else until you’ve had your say, but this revelation of yours had better take the twist out of my knickers.”

Dumbledore put down his cup, smiled, and replied, “Amelia in the many years that I’ve known you, I’ve never known you to mince words, and I’ve always respected your fairness. I will not disappoint you on this, and believe that you will appreciate why I have kept this information virtually to myself for many years. Thank you for your patience. Shall we go back?”

To Dumbledore’s great relief, no one had left, not even Hestia. There wasn’t a sound in the room as Bones took her seat. Dumbledore began his tale of full disclosure. He told them of hearing the prophecy sixteen and a half years ago and believing it to be authentic. He told them of informing the Potters and the Longbottoms that both Lilly and Alice matched the descriptions. He told them of the night that James and Lilly had died, and his decision to place Harry in the care of his muggle relatives rather than with his appointed guardians in the belief that he could not be harmed while in their care. He told them of Harry’s reaction after learning of the prophecy. He told them of Snape’s request to avoid being sent to Azkaban. The only aspect that he omitted was Moody’s involvement in Snape’s death.

Dumbledore continued. “As such, I have violated, stretched and broken many laws in my lifetime. I do not deny those things, nor do I believe would you. Sturgis endured Azkaban for six months this year in an attempt to keep the prophecy away from Voldemort. Arthur nearly lost his life in the same effort. Sirius had his life taken from him protecting Harry. He was there of his own free will that night, as were the others who followed Harry, and those who went to help him.”

He continued. "Michael Wood had his life taken from him protecting Harry, having freely placed himself in harm's way. I believe that everyone here would place themselves in harm's way to give Harry just a bit more time to prepare himself for his destiny. And let there be no doubt - he is nearly ready. He had dueled Bellatrix to a draw by the time that I had reached him in the atrium. He caused grievous injury to Voldemort when Riddle attempted to possess him. That, I believe, is the reason that we have not heard more from him in the last few weeks. In fact, Harry has faced Riddle five times and not been bested. No one else had done that." There were murmurs of astonishment at this news. Few had heard it before.

He concluded. "It is my intent to transition the leadership of the Order to Harry in the current year. His time has come and mine is passing. I would ask that you give him your full support as you have always given it to me."

Dumbledore looked at Bones, nodded and finished, saying, "I believe Minister Bones has some closing remarks."

She stood and said, "I believe another five minute recess is in order." Dumbledore's telling of the prophecy had been astonishing, but somehow not surprising. Many of the pieces clicked into place.

Dumbledore had violated Black's rights as a legally designated godparent and subjected Harry to fifteen years of abuse. Certain that Black had been wronged, he elected not to stand in the way when Crouch moved to imprison him without a trial. Had he done that to ensure that Harry's placement at his Aunt's house was not challenged and overturned as it surely would have been? She was certain about one thing – he had tossed aside laws and lives to do what he considered to be right.

She stood to speak. "I offer you my perspective tonight as the guardian of a young witch, and a concerned citizen, not as Minister of Magic. Many of us were amazed at the revelations Professor Dumbledore provided us this evening. For others, his words simply filled in the small gaps of our knowledge of the events that he described.

“My quarrel with Professor Dumbledore is not over his intent, for surely we are all against Voldemort and his followers. My quarrel is specifically related to his methods. He has consistently asked people to be in harm’s way. A government is naturally distrustful of a militia, and the Order certainly qualifies as a militia, but that is another long conversation for another evening. You have willingly placed yourselves in harm’s way for what we collectively believe is a good cause.

“Sirius Black had his rights violated for thirteen years due to a decision that Professor Dumbledore made without consulting anyone. Harry Potter had his rights violated for fifteen years. The Grangers had their rights violated. It is not our right to insist that Harry Potter solve our problems for us. The prophecy that Trelawney uttered is open to dozens of interpretations. With the news thrust upon Harry as I’m certain that it was, most people would be driven to despair or madness. Potter asked only to be able to live one summer as a normal teenager. The responsible move would be not to place him in a cage, rather exercise what my own mentor referred to as constant vigilance.” Moody nodded at her.

“We can not protect Potter if Voldemort decides to vaporize Hogwarts or central London with a nuclear weapon. There are limits to any protection that any government or militia could give a person. Could the thirty of you withstand an attack by an assembled army of a thousand dementors, vampires and Death Eaters?” Several people shook their heads, no.

She continued, “We can provide Potter with a reasonable amount of security, and the means to escape if attacked. I believe that he has these things right now, though his guard could easily be doubled without unduly taxing the Ministry’s resources.”

She took a sip of water, and continued. “Yes, it was his decision to go to the Grangers, and as such, they are at risk.”

Tonks stood up, “Excuse me Minister.

Bones smiled indulgently at the young Auror, admiring her spunk. “Go ahead, Auror Tonks.”

“Harry has informed the Grangers of everything that we have heard here this evening, if not more. They have taken him in with full disclosure. He offered to tell the same things to me so that I would know the risks of being by him. In my direct observation, Harry Potter is acting incredibly responsibly, regardless of his age.” She sat down. Nearly everyone was nodding their head in agreement of her words.

Bones continued, “I would concur with Auror Tonks’ words, and request that she return to her post immediately following the meeting. It is my understanding that nearly half of the students at Hogwarts would have willingly followed Potter to the Ministry in June. This may end up being the younger generation’s fight. Time will tell. Indeed, he is a natural leader.”

“Regarding the Order, I welcome the new spirit of candor. Too many secrets have been kept, and the cost has been unacceptably high. I welcome the news of the transition in leadership, assuming Mr. Potter even has an interest in being associated with you. I want to be perfectly clear on one thing. The Order does not have the right to violate the laws of Britain, or the rights of the citizens. I encourage you to continue the fight against Voldemort and his followers. However, you must act within the law, as do the Aurors who will be taking a much more aggressive stance against his followers. There is no allowance to be made for breaking these two rules in the guise of a greater good scenario.”

She concluded, asking, “Would anyone like a clarification?”

Remus found Minerva after the meeting and asked, “What can we do to help him?”

Minerva replied, “I’m not certain that Dumbledore...”

Remus cut her off, saying, “Not him. Harry.”

Minerva thought for a moment and responded, “I seriously doubt that at this point, he would accept membership in the Order, the lead of

the Order, or any assistance from the Order. We haven't even taken proper care of his property. This home is a wreck, and his broomstick is chained up in the damp dungeons of the castle."

Remus simply responded, "We need to change our ways. Does Minister Bones know where they are staying? I would like to go there and help if I can."

Minerva replied, "I'm certain that she does. Good luck."

Back in the kitchen, Dumbledore and Bones were having another conversation. "Well done, Professor. I knew that you had it in you. Flicking her wand again to create a wall of silence she asked, "Who helped Snape?"

Dumbledore simply replied, "I did."

Bones replied, "Now that you have gotten that confession off of your chest, let's move on, shall we? I'm not your priest. I don't offer forgiveness. You'll need to seek that in the next life. Hermione deserves to know that she was not responsible for taking a life. I will offer her an explanation. The fact remains that you weren't there, and most of the list of visitors to St. Mungo's that morning would have gladly assisted in that evil git's passing from this life. Let's drop that as a subject, shall we? How can I assist you in training Potter this term? That's assuming he wants anyone's help."

Dumbledore thought for a moment and replied, "I will meet with you in two days to discuss the matter. In the mean while, I will consider the different options that we could present to him. Is that acceptable?" He was relieved that he had not been arrested.

Bones replied. "Monday the fifth at 9:00AM in my office would be fine. Please learn to enjoy your shorter leash Professor. I prefer you there. Goodnight."

Tonks was tired the next morning. 'Merlin, talk about having the weight of the world on you. Here was a kid, no, here was a young man, no, here was a brave wizard who had effectively been handed a death sentence asking if he could get me a cup of coffee.' She looked in his emerald eyes and replied, "Please, Harry. Thank you."

Harry handed her a cup, and she asked, "What are your plans for the day?"

"Hermione and I are planning on going swimming at the reef off of Neptune beach. We would like you to come with us if you'd like."

Her bright blue eyes met his. "Of course, I'd like to go with. Why there? Hoping to see another mermaid?" she teased.

"Possibly," he said, "Though they're not like the paintings that you may have seen. Mostly they're gray and slimy. Hermione bought some gillyweed, so we will be underwater for an hour."

Tonks remember watching Harry wade into the freezing water at the lake in February and comprehension fell on her. "Cor, that's how you did it. It makes you a better swimmer too?"

Harry nodded, "Like a natural."

Hermione came over and greeted their bodyguard. "Hi Tonks. Did Harry ask you?"

She smiled back and replied, "Yep. Are you ready to go?"

Church, Dan and Emma had been briefed on what they were going to do, so they weren't planning on panicking if they were underwater for a while. The beach was nearly deserted, as there was a slight rain. Church conjured a big umbrella, for her and the Grangers to wait under.

To disguise their actual activity, Tonks had conjured snorkels, masks and flippers for the three swimmers as well as a dive buoy. They swam out to the reef which was deserted of other divers, and placed all of their equipment in the mesh bag that Tonks had tied to the buoy

anchor rope. Hermione gave them each a gob of the gillyweed, and they each ate their piece. As Harry had indicated, within a minute they each felt a sharp pain along the sides of their neck as the gill slits opened.

Harry felt his hands and feet elongate and web over like little flippers. Immediately he began diving down to swim the reef. He could see perfectly under the water. He looked over to see Hermione and Tonks and nearly fainted. They looked like the most beautiful mermaids imaginable. They had removed their bikini tops and placed them in the mesh bag and were, well, they were beautiful. Hermione swam up to Harry and drew him into the most wonderful kiss that he could imagine. Not needing to break for air, they went on for what seemed hours. After five minutes, Tonks tapped the two on the shoulder, gave Harry a quick kiss on the cheek and they continued their adventure.

The fish were beautiful. A few were big, but most were small and just darted from one hiding place to another. Hermione pointed, and they saw a sea turtle and swam down to it. They followed it around for a few minutes, then went back to the reef, by the dive bag. The bottom was equally interesting. They saw little sea creatures darting along the bottom, sea urchins, plants and more little fish.

Harry looked at his watch. They had two minutes to go, so they began the swim back to the surface. Just as they reached the waterline, they again felt the pain in their necks. A moment later they poked their heads above the waterline.

"That was fantastic!" said Tonks and Hermione together.

"I thought so too," replied Harry, thinking of something else.

Hermione said, "The turtle was so beautiful. It was so graceful in the water. It was amazing." Harry put his flippers back on. Hermione asked him if he would kiss her again.

Harry swam over to her. She placed his hand on her breast and said, "Now you can kiss me properly, silly." And he did. Tonks kept a respectful distance, willing to give Harry all of the slack in the world.

Harry helped tie her strings and the three of them paddled the two hundred yards back into the shore. The drizzle had stopped, and it looked like it would be another beautiful day. They waded in, and found Dan and Emma snoozing under the umbrella while Church was reading a novel.

"How was it?" asked Emma.

"Fantastic!" replied Hermione. "We saw hundreds of fish and plants and we swam with a huge sea turtle."

"See any mermaids?" quipped Dan.

"Actually, I saw two," replied Harry, "But they were different than the ones I'd seen in Scotland."

"Figures," muttered Dan.

"Dad," said Hermione. "Harry's teasing. He just saw us swimming around."

"Oh," said Dan, feeling a bit less sorry for himself.

"But, I had a great time," said Harry, beaming at Hermione.

"That's nice, dear," said Emma, hoping that they had spent a few minutes together.

"Dad, the next time we go, would you like to go with?" asked Hermione.

Dan considered her amazing offer for a moment and declined saying, "Thanks but I'll stick with golf. Emma might."

"What was it like?" asked Emma

"We grew gills and flippers and could swim around like frogs," said Tonks. "It was amazing."

"Had you done it before?" asked Emma,

“Never,” replied Tonks. “But, I’m sure that I’ll go again.”

Emma hesitated. “Are you certain that I could. I’m not...”

Tonks replied, “I’ll inquire just to be certain. I believe in this case the magic is in the plant, not the person. That’s why so many potions would work on anybody, not just magical people.”

“Let’s go get lunch,” said Harry.

After lunch, Dan and Emma went shopping, while Harry, Hermione and Tonks sat in the back garden having a lemonade.

“How did the meeting go?” asked Hermione.

Tonks replied, “In my opinion, Minister Bones has a better grasp of how to fight a war than Fudge did. She doesn’t have her head in the sand, she’s realistic about what is happening, and she has a high regard for people’s rights. She gave the Order guidelines that they were to follow while acting as a militia. She said that the Ministry is going to move from strictly a reactionary defensive role in the war to a position of offense. I took that to mean that we will be handed a list of Death Eaters and told to hunt them down.”

As Harry and Hermione nodded in agreement, Tonks continued. “Dumbledore discussed Harry’s role and the details of the prophecy. I’ll say that I’m honored to be able to help you in any way that I possibly can.”

Harry replied, “Tonks, you have done so much for us. You’ve helped me have the best holiday of my life, and I simply don’t have the words to express my gratitude to you. Everyday you help protect the people that I care the most about in the world. Thank you.”

Tonks blushed slightly at the profound compliment, knowing that Harry was absolutely sincere. She replied, “Harry, the Order will most likely be coming to you and your friends asking how it can be of

service to you. I don't think you'll be kept out of any more meetings, or any secrets. You'll have to decide what we can best do to help you."

Harry didn't say anything for a few minutes. They sat in comfortable silence. Finally he said, "There must be a hundred ways to kill Voldemort. I don't need to learn them all. I need to learn one way that will actually work, and get in a position where I can try it. For the first time in my life, I truly believe that I have someone to live for, and I don't want to lose."

Hermione leaned over and whispered, "I'll give you as many reasons to live Harry as you could possibly want. When can I start?" she asked with a gleam in her eye.

A/N

Thanks for the insightful reviews and emails that I have received. I can't reply if you don't have an email listed. I hope everyone is OK with the meeting at Grimmauld. I think it fits well. I hope to have more gillyweed adventures in the next chapter. I think they're fun.

Next up:

The trials, and the Grangers confrontation with Dumbledore.

Final question – How many Death Eaters are there at the end of book 5?

If you have a good independent Harry or H/Hr story to recommend, please mention it in your review.

O-C

Chapter 16

“So aside from kicking Tom Riddle’s arse, what would you like to do with your life?”

“I’d like to marry Hermione, be a great husband, a great dad and find ways to use the gold that I was given to help people start business of their own like I was able to do with Ron’s brothers.”

Dan nodded. “I couldn’t fault your ideas, or your taste in women. My own parents were pretty well off – nowhere near your situation, but they were able to help me through school and to get us started in our own practice. I met Emma our first year at university. We just clicked. Her pregnancy with Hermione went badly, and we weren’t able to have other children, but we’ve had a great life together.”

As they were walking to the 16th green, Dan continued. “We began noticing her special abilities when she was eight. Obviously we didn’t know what it was, but she mended a teacup on several occasions when one would fall off of the table and break. I wasn’t as close to her as I could have been, as she deserved, or as I wish that I had been. The ministry of magic doesn’t do a lot for nonmagical families of magical children.”

After they putted, Dan finished. “Anyway, I was always pretty good with my hands and dentistry has been a good career for me. I hope that your path is as clear for you. I know that you love Hermione, and I know that you’re a good man, so I hope that the two of you find a lot of happiness together. Is there anything that I can do to help you short term?”

Harry replied, “There is. I was wondering if there would be a way that you and Emma could take a year off at your business? What I’m really trying to say is that the most important thing that the two of you could do for us right now is to stay safe, happy and healthy. Could you go visit the States or Asia for a year? Maybe you could take a long cruise?”

After they had hit their tee shots, Harry continued. “What I’m trying to say is that neither of us could stand it if anything happened to you or

Emma, and as much as Auror Tonks or the others might try, they really can't protect you in Surrey. I'd be more than happy to cover all of the expenses. We just don't want to lose you."

Dan had come to view the young man with increased respect every hour that he spent with him. The last three hours had brought that up several levels. He heard the spoken and unspoken words that Harry had said to him, and found Harry's judgment to be excellent. He could turn the business over to the young dentist that they had recently interviewed and the senior hygienist. After they finished putting, Dan asked, "What timeframe do you recommend?"

Harry replied, "Hopefully you could be ready in a week or two – by the end of August at the latest. I'd recommend selling your home, or renting it out, and putting your things in storage. Maybe we could just get a caretaker if the home itself is that important. I'm sorry to have to make these suggestions. I'm sure that they're not things that you want to hear."

Dan replied, "Harry, I know how much you value honesty and openness. So do I. Emma and I aren't married to our practice. We're not married to our home. They both have significant meaning to us, but they're nothing that can't be replaced. Emma, Hermione and you, our family – those are the things that have meaning. Let's go talk with Emma and Hermione. This could be a long conversation."

It turned out to be a surprisingly short conversation. Harry had not previously discussed his feelings on the subject with Hermione, but she had recently had a similar conversation with her mum. They made arrangements to leave Nice in two days time, so they would get back home on Sat 17 August. Dan would meet with their solicitor on Monday.

Tonks listened to the conversation in silence. Harry was effectively doing the same thing to the Grangers that Dumbledore had tried to do to him. The only difference was that Harry wasn't trying to lock them up, rather give them options that they could live with, and send them out of harm's way, indeed, half way around the world for a year until they could reasonably be certain that they would again be safe.

Effectively they were preparing for the war that they knew to be rapidly approaching.

Tonks knew that Harry and Hermione were not dodging the war that was drawing them in. She knew that they would willingly do their part, and then some. She also recognized that they felt like they had to do their part on their own terms. She met with Jamie, who agreed to go back and inform Minister Bones.

The next morning they went back to Neptune beach. Tonks conjured them all snorkel gear like she had the day before and set out the diving buoy by the reef. She hadn't mentioned it, but she also brought along a portkey to St. Mungo's in the event that Emma had a bad reaction to the gillyweed.

Hermione took her piece first, and swallowed it. Seconds later, the gill slits appeared and she dove under the water. Emma went next, took her piece and swallowed it. Thirty seconds later, the magical plant did its magic, and she dove under the water. Harry waited a few minutes and joined them. Emma and Hermione were in about thirty feet of water looking like they were having the time of their lives. Like sea otters, they swam to and fro, chasing the fish and each other.

At Tonk's urging, they did not stray too far from the reef and Harry kept a careful eye on his watch. They were following an octopus when Harry realized that Hermione's hour was nearly up. He tapped her shoulder and pointed to his watch. Hermione swam to the surface, and a minute later, got her mask and flipper from the mesh bag where they had put them.

As Harry was feeling the pain in his own neck signifying that his hour was up, he noticed the same thing was happening to Emma. He swam to her, took her hand and they surfaced together.

As they surfaced, the normally reserved dentist grabbed him and gave him a huge kiss on the cheek, and exclaimed, "That was bloody brilliant! That was the most fun I've ever had in one hour, bar none. Thank you both for sharing that with me." She hugged Hermione then

hugged Harry again. Tonks would have been slightly embarrassed at her words, but had thought the same thing herself when she'd tried it the previous day.

A few minutes later, they had reached the shore and waded in. Dan looked at his love for a moment, as she broke into the biggest smile that he could remember. He said, "I take it that the three of you had fun together."

Emma started in telling him how her feet grew, and she could breathe under the water, all the while chasing fish effortlessly.

A few minutes later, Hermione again asked her dad if he'd ever want to try it. Dan shook his head no, and replied, "When I was in my late twenties, I had the urge to go skydiving once, but that idea wasn't received very well with your mum." He hugged her and replied, "I'll stick to golf, thanks."

They wound up their trip to Nice by having dinner at one of the popular pubs. Hermione was a bit apprehensive when she noticed a collection of bikini tops hanging above the bar. She wasn't sure about what Harry expected from her physically, and had many of the same insecurities as any sixteen year old dating steady for the first time. She wasn't certain if she was ready to be intimate with anyone, but knew that she loved Harry so much and that he loved her too.

Adding to her stress was the knowledge that half of the older witches at Hogwarts would offer him any activity that he might desire on a casual basis, simply due to his fame or his wealth.

It was that stress that led her into his room at 11PM that evening. Harry was, in fact sleeping, happily dreaming very naughty thoughts about Hermione.

"Hi Harry," she whispered in a soft voice, casting a silencing charm over the door.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, slightly nervous about her being in such close proximity

“I wanted to be with you, together.” She was scared about what she was thinking of doing, scared that he might not find her desirable, or that he might reject her offer.

Looking into his sleepy eyes she asked, “Can I spend the night with you?”

Harry could sense her nervousness and felt the same way himself. “I’d like nothing better, but I need to be certain that we would be doing this for the right reasons. Mione, I want to so much, but I’m scared too. Everything is so great between us right now. If you’re ready, I’m ready. If you want to wait, I’ll wait forever until you’re ready.”

Nuzzling his nose, she whispered, “Thank you Harry. I want to really bad, but I’m not quite...”

Shaking her apology off, he stroked her arms and asked, “I’d never ask you to do something that you’re not ready for. Can we still spend the night together? I won’t do any...” He stopped. His breath had been taken away. Her nightgown had slipped to the floor.

Forcing himself to breathe and not gawk like an idiot, Harry was awestruck at the beautiful sight. There was so much skin, everywhere. Hermione tentatively sat on his bed as Harry held open the sheet for her. He saw her beautiful face next to his in the dim moonlight and began to devour her, kissing her forehead, ears, neck, and shoulders as he ever so slowly worked his way downward.

For several hours, there was no Voldemort; there were no Death Eaters, no bank vaults, nothing. There were just two young lovers finding their way together. The sounds of the waves of the sea were overpowered by their love for each other.

At 4:30 the next morning, Hermione gently kissed her best friend on the forehead as he slept. She whispered, “I love you so much, Harry

Potter,” as she got up. She pulled on her nightgown and quietly opened the door to go back to her room. She finished packing, showered, got dressed and went down to make coffee. She found Jamie, and handed her a cup.

Jamie thanked her, hesitated for a moment and said, “Hermione, it’s not my place to tell you how to live your life, and you know that I wish you a world of happiness. While I’m sure that you remembered to place an effective silencing charm over the door, you may want to do the same with any open windows in the future.” Smiling and with bright eyes, she continued, “I need to apparate over to the airport to check on some arrangements. Tonks is up. I’ll be back in a half hour. The van should be here at 7:00.”

Only slightly embarrassed, Hermione nodded, and said, “Thanks Jamie.”

There were mixed emotions on the ride back to the airport. Each of them could honestly say that this had been the best two and a half weeks of their lives. Each was sorry that their time together in Nice had come to a close. Each had come to the realization that they had made their best plan together, and knew what they needed to do in the next week.

Harry noticed things on his second flight that he hadn’t seen the first time. He’d been able to glance in the cockpit while boarding, and saw the pilot, first officer and navigator going through their pre-flight checklist. The first officer nodded at him as he walked by.

He felt the wheels lose contact with the ground as they lifted off and were tucked into the jetliner a few moments later. He watched as the flight attendants served him and the other passengers their beverages, and breakfast on little trays, then with remarkable efficiency collected everything as they made their way to Heathrow airport.

They hadn't really bought much when they were there other than a few shirts, and souvenirs. Dan had taken quite a few photos that they would get developed and printed in the next week.

On the flight, Emma had coached Harry about getting through the customs inspection and had helped him fill out his declaration forms. He felt rather pleased with himself as he was handed back his stamped passport and waited for the others.

Jamie met them outside the customs checkpoint and they put their belongings into a van. They stopped at Diagon Alley. Harry stopped in at Gringotts for a moment, then Hermione bought another book, and Harry bought five magical storage trunks in a brief shopping flurry. He shrunk them and placed them in a bag. On the way out, he bought a case of butterbeer from Tom, and they drove back to their home.

Dan asked Harry what he had wanted the trunks for. Harry expanded them and opened one. Dan was shocked as he looked in. Each was about the size of a single stall garage! Harry said, "The ministry people could have one delivered to you if you like. Otherwise, Hermione and I would be happy to keep them for you at Gringotts or at Grimmauld Place."

Dan was incredibly grateful at the generosity that the young man was displaying. He replied, "Thank you, Harry. That will make things a lot easier for us. Are you sure that it's not too much trouble?"

Harry replied, "It's no bother at all. Beside, I would happily do anything for you and Emma."

"Dan looked at him and said, "You're a good man, Harry. I know that you would."

"So are you. How can I help?"

Emma said, "Dan will make the arrangements at the surgery in the next two days."

There was a knock on the door. Wand out, Harry went to answer it. Amelia Bones and Connie Hammer were there. "Good evening, Harry," said Amelia. "May we come in? We came to visit with Emma."

"Please," replied Harry, putting his wand back in his wrist holster.

Emma saw them and said, "Hello Amelia, Connie. It's good to see you both. Please come in. Can I get you a coffee or tea?"

"Please," said Amelia.

When Emma returned, Amelia asked, "How are you?"

Emma said, "We're fine, and currently we're safe. We had a lovely time in Nice. Actually this was the best family holiday that I can remember. We took the time to discuss the civil war going on in the wizarding world. Hermione and Harry have asked us to take an extended vacation to the States or somewhere else. Our safety is currently a significant concern to both of them, as it is to us. As such, Dan and I have decided to spend some time in the States. We have the resources available to get by. Our plans are to pack our things into storage and hire a caretaker for the garden. Dan is making arrangements for the operation of the surgery. Harry has offered us the use of one of his homes until we are ready to go."

Amelia smiled, and replied, "He is a remarkable young man. I'd have to agree with your daughter's assessment regarding the risks in Britain. Given that you have the resources, I hope that you are able to enjoy yourselves. Far too few people take the time to live and enjoy themselves then they are young and have their health. What can I do to help you?"

Emma thought for a moment and replied, "Would it be possible to arrange some sort of secure mail forwarding service? It would be nice to get the post from time to time."

Harry came back into the family room and said, "The Gringotts goblins have taken care of all of your financial issues. They offered to take care all of any bills that come in the post while you are away."

Connie had never heard of the Gringotts goblins offering such a service. Seeing that she was about to say something, Amelia nodded and replied, "An excellent idea Harry." Turning to Emma she handed her a business card, and said, "This is my private telephone line. You can reach me at any hour by calling that number. Please contact me when you get settled. I will provide you with the number of a local contact. When will you be leaving?"

Dan said, "We should be done here Monday evening. We will be staying at one of Harry's homes for the rest of the week, and most likely take a flight Saturday afternoon the 24th."

Bones looked at Harry who nodded, silently confirming that they would be going to Grimmauld Place.

Hermione was amazed that the Minister of Magic would personally be concerned with such details, but acknowledged that Harry was one of the most prominent wizards in Britain if not the world, and fame and fortune had their advantages.

On Sunday morning, Harry awoke to find that there were not two but four guards around the home. Dan had left to go to the surgery to make the needed arrangements. Harry was not surprised that two other Aurors had gone with him.

After breakfast, Emma said that they should begin packing. Harry suggested that they pack one trunk with things that they would like to bring with them, and regular suitcases for a few changes of clothing. They could use another for household items that they would not need, a third for the garden and garage things. He gave the fourth trunk to Hermione to pack her things that she would want to bring with her. Different than the other three, it was a five-lock model similar to the one that he had seen Moody use several years previously. He had a similar trunk for himself.

Hermione knew that her mum's heart must be breaking. She knew that her parents loved their home and had always been happy there. Emma loved the kitchen, garden and the pool, while Dan loved the

study. As they carefully put things into the trunk, Hermione hoped for the day that she could help her parents put their belongings back in their right place. Hermione had transfigured a roll of paper towels into packing boxes and a packet of dinner napkins into packing blankets. By dinnertime they had packed about half of their things.

Emma insisted on cooking a more elaborate dinner than any of them really wanted. Hermione realized that it was the last dinner that her mum might prepare there. The only way that they would be in a position to return would be if Voldemort were defeated.

After dinner, they looked at the photos that Dan had taken in Nice. He had two extra sets of prints made, and gave one each to Hermione and to Harry. He also gave them each a photo album containing family photos beginning when Hermione was a toddler up to the ones of all of them that he had taken within the last few days. He told Harry, "I heard that you don't have too many photos yet. We will add to these in the coming years." Both Hermione and Harry were grateful for the gifts.

Hermione had gone to bed first. Dan went up shortly after. As Harry was getting up to go, Emma told him, "Harry you don't need our permission, but you have our blessing to do what it takes to take care of Hermione while we're gone. We know that you two love each other, and that you'll be under a lot of stress. If you two can take comfort from each other and give each other love, you should. Dan and I have signed a parental permission form for the two of you to act on your own behalves during the school year. We love you Harry as our own son and wish you the best. Unless I'm mistaken, Hermione is in her room, crying her eyes out. Can you tuck her in for me?"

Harry nodded. "Goodnight," they each said at the same time.

By noon the next morning they were all packed. Harry sat on the back steps with Tonks and Jamie, giving the three of them some privacy as they looked around their home together. Hermione charmed the trunks to be light and they loaded them into a ministry van that Church had brought.

Dan locked the home, and gave Hermione a set of the keys to the house and the two cars. They rode together in Dan's BMW following the Ministry van. Tonks and Jamie led driving Emma's BMW, Jamie and the other two Aurors followed in the van.

The brownstone row house had a two-car garage in the back. Number 12 was the only one of the large mansion sized homes that had not been subdivided in recent years. Built just over a hundred years ago, Harry placed the key in the lock with a sense of dread.

He had not been there since last Christmas, and the home held many sad memories for him. Expecting to see the dingy dark home that he remembered, Harry was shocked when he arrived. "Harry Potter sir, you has arrived. Dobby is so happy."

"I'm happy to see you here too Dobby. Hello Winky." When did you come here?" Harry wasn't sure that he wanted anything to do with Dumbledore right now. As far as that went, Harry wondered how Dumbledore would have known that Harry would have been there.

"Professor Dumbledore asked Dobby to come and work here for the rest of the holiday Harry Potter, Sir. He asked Dobby to come here two days ago. Winky came along to help."

It didn't take Harry long to conclude who know that they were leaving Nice two days ago. Harry was angry, but realized that the little elves had done nothing wrong.

Harry looked around the home. It barely resembled the home that he had stayed at last December. The walls were stripped of the peeling wall coverings that had been there. The threadbare carpets and rugs had been removed and the hardwood flooring polished. The home was by no means elegantly appointed, but it was clean and very livable.

Dumbledore hadn't taken the Fidelius charm off of the home as he had been directed to, but there was no evidence that it was being used by the Order. Harry was disappointed in Dumbledore. Tonks was obviously reporting on their activity, and he had disregarded

specific instructions from the Minister of Magic regarding Harry's home.

There were three floors and a cellar in the home. Each level was about three thousand square feet. On the first level there was a large kitchen, entryway, library, two bathrooms, a dining room and a large area that had been used for entertaining. On the second level were eight good-sized bedrooms and two bathrooms. The third level was largely open except for a well-appointed study. Harry thought that the open area could easily be used for training.

He asked Dan and Emma and Hermione to select rooms then went downstairs to talk with Dobby, Winky and the Aurors. Harry asked Dobby to have dinner ready within an hour and asked the little elf what thing he needed. He gave Dobby a sack of Galleons and asked him to get anything that he might need.

Winky had made a very nice dinner, of roast beef, potatoes, vegetables, a salad and cherry pie for desert. Harry insisted that the elves eat with them. Neither Dan nor Emma had ever met an elf before. They both were very curious about the happy little creatures. Harry delighted Dobby with his tales of using the gillyweed in Nice. Both Dobby and Winky seemed happier than Harry could remember previously seeing them.

After dinner Harry was getting ready to rip into Tonks when the fireplace flared up. Arthur, Molly, Ron and Ginny came through. Arthur had a nasty gash across his right bicep and was bleeding badly.

"What are you doing here?" asked Harry and Ron at the same time. Harry recovered and said, "You first."

Out of breath, Ron said, "Attacked. There must have been fifty Death Eaters outside our house. This was the first place that we could think of. The burrow was on fire. I'm surprised that we got out."

A/N

If Harry decided not to go back to Hogwarts and had private tutoring, would Hermione follow him?

PS. I've been reading a great story from Bobmin356 – Dumbledore's Army. It has a sequel and along with UdderPd's work is excellent

Chapter 17

Just then, Tonks, Church and the Grangers walked in, with looks of total surprise on their faces. Harry's anger was instantly displaced with concern over his friend's family. There were a lot of healing potions and the like left over from when the Order was using the home. Molly cast a healing charm over the gash, and got a blood restorative potion from the kitchen. Fifteen minutes later, Arthur was resting comfortably in one of the rooms upstairs.

Molly returned to the kitchen to find it full of people. Hammer and the rest of the Weasleys had arrived. Kingsley arrived a minute later. The burrow was nothing but ash, but no one had been killed or seriously injured.

Dumbledore arrived a moment later. He saw her and asked, "Is everyone OK, Molly?"

With tears in her eyes she nodded, and replied, "Arthur will be all right. He's upstairs resting."

Kingsley mentioned that the burrow had been destroyed and none of the Death Eaters responsible had been apprehended.

Harry and Hermione listened in sadness, holding each other's hand. The twins noticed, but didn't say anything.

Dumbledore replied, "Molly perhaps Harry would allow you to stay in his excellent home?"

Harry nodded. Ron looked over to see and saw Harry and Hermione. She had her arm around his waist. Ron walked out muttering loudly, "He's got everything. I've got nothing." A moment later, he slammed the back door behind him while walking outside.

Harry was about to go after him, but Emma said, "Harry, leave him be for a moment. I'll go look after him. Perhaps you can find appropriate rooms for everyone who needs one. People need to be fed and have something to wear."

Harry and Hermione led Ginny upstairs and put her into the room between Ron and Dan and Emma. He asked her if she was OK.

Ginny's eyes welled with tears. "We're fine now. It was really terrifying. I was amazed that the floo worked. I was so scared."

They could easily relate, having watched Malfoy and Snape try and torch the Granger home. Hermione brought her a spare set of clothing and pajamas. Harry gave her a hug and said, "We'll get you everything that you need, tomorrow."

She whimpered, "Thanks, Harry. Thanks, Hermione. I love you both."

Hermione nodded and replied, "We love you too, Ginny. Goodnight."

Emma found Ron an hour later. Sitting down by him, She asked, "Why did you choose to treat your friend so badly back there? He was only trying to help."

"It's not fair. He's got everything, and now he's got Hermione too."

She thought, 'So that was it. Trios end badly.'

She looked at him and said, "From what I was able to observe in the last six weeks, I'd more accurately describe it as she's caught him, but we're getting off track. Neither one of them did anything to intentionally hurt you. I think they both were hurting so badly that they needed to heal each other. I don't think it makes them bad people."

They both sat there for a few minutes in silence. Ron kept trying to think of rational endings to the phrase "But he's..." and couldn't think of anything that would fit. Finally Emma asked, "Are you uncomfortable knowing that my daughter loves Harry or that Harry's murdered relatives have left him with some assets?"

Ron answered, "Yes."

Emma took that to mean yes to both questions. She asked, "Ron, how many brothers and sisters do you have?"

"Six."

"If your parents had been murdered today and you and your brothers had been left with a hundred Sterling, I mean a hundred Galleons each, would you be happy?"

"Of course not."

"A thousand each?"

"No. I'd never..."

"A hundred thousand each?"

"No. I don't want their money."

With a sad look on her face, she replied, "Either does Harry. How many people did he lose? - Parents, grandparents, godparents? Dan and I took him into our home and became his guardians before we knew that he had anything. Money doesn't make him a better person and not having piles doesn't make you or I lesser people. Let's take that one off of the table OK?"

Ron looked at her and nodded.

Emma continued, "At the birthday party, you were interested in a very attractive young witch, Lavender. Did Harry react badly when he saw you two together?"

"No."

"Hermione says that she's a popular girl."

Ron nodded. Lavender was a popular witch.

"Was Harry jealous when he found out that you two were seeing each other?"

“No.” Ron thought for a moment and realized, ‘He looked happy for me.’

Emma said, “Ron, things change. My life will never be the same. After our home was attacked and Harry and Hermione were forced to take those lives, I was certain that all of our lives had changed forever. Later I realized that I wasn’t worried about losing our home. Heaven only knows if it’s still standing. That’s why we’re all here. We’re refugees on the run. The only difference was we had a day to pack our things.”

Ron wasn’t entirely convinced and muttered, “But he’s got everything...”

Emma was getting frustrated at the bull headed boy. “What he has is a death sentence on his head with that damn prophecy. Are you so sure that you want to trade lives with him?”

“What?” Ron was flabbergasted at her words.

Emma replied, “That prophecy, the one that almost got Hermione killed in June. It said that Harry had to kill that Voldemort wizard or die trying. That sort of makes a three-day root canal sound like a day on the beach in comparison to me.”

Ron was almost speechless. He stammered, “How do you...?”

Emma replied, “He told us about it so that we would understand the danger associated with having him in our family.”

Not giving up while he still had a shred of dignity, Ron whined, “Why didn’t he tell me?”

Emma responded, “I suppose he wasn’t ready to share that information at the time, and it probably isn’t something that you’d just drop into the post. It does take some getting used to. Maybe it was a need-to-know consideration. It doesn’t matter, except that he believes that it’s real.”

For once, he didn't have a comeback.

After a moment, she asked him, "Shall we go back in now?"

The tall red-headed young man nodded and they walked back inside. Bill, Charlie, Kingsley and Hammer had already left. Dumbledore was talking quietly with Tonks in the library. Church and Dan were waiting in the kitchen.

Few wizards maintained any sort of homeowners or personal property insurance. It wasn't a concept that had ever caught on in the wizarding world. As such, except for the little money that Arthur had saved in their Gringotts vault, the Weasleys were, in fact, penniless. At that moment, Molly couldn't care less. She was upstairs caressing Arthur's brow. She still had her husband and all of her children.

Ron had had the good grace to go off to bed. Dumbledore finally left, leaving Harry, Tonks and the Grangers downstairs. Emma asked, "Would anyone care for a late desert?" Instantly Winky appeared with plates of apple pie and whipping cream.

"Thank you, Winky," they all said. The little elf beamed at them.

"I wonder what they'll do," said Tonks more to herself than anyone.

"What do you mean, Tonks?" asked Emma.

She replied, "My dad was telling me that non magical people usually purchase an insurance policy on their home to help cover the expenses in the event of damage. It is a contract where..."

"We know what it is," replied Emma, "but what did you mean?"

"There isn't anything like that in the wizarding world. Well maybe at Harry's level, but not for regular wizarding folk. In most cases, it wouldn't make any sense, since witches and wizards can repair most things, but to have your whole home burned out like that – I suspect that they're in a bad way."

The enormity of their loss quickly sunk in. What little the Weasleys had was gone. Hermione looked at Harry, who nodded, and asked, "How much would it cost to build them a new home?"

Tonks was no expert, but had some experience in filing damage reports in her work as an Auror. She considered what he was really asking her and replied, "Perhaps ten thousand galleons."

Harry nodded. Going to Gringotts in the morning and giving them the gold would be the easy part. Getting them to accept it would be almost impossible.

After Emma had gone to bed, Harry asked the young Auror, "Tonks, how did Dumbledore know that we were here?"

'The fit's gonna hit the shan,' she thought. She replied, "Harry, I told him that we were coming back early from Nice, and I told him that you and the Grangers were coming here. I'm certain that's why Dobby and Winky had been sent here."

Dan asked, "Is it normal procedure in bodyguard duty to reveal your client's movements ahead of time?"

Tonks hair turned blue, reflecting the guilt of her reply. "No, but Harry's..."

Dan cut her off. "Harry's my responsibility. If you felt that there was a legitimate reason to keep his schoolmaster apprised of our holiday plans, you should have mentioned the need and the logic to us, don't you agree?"

Harry added, "I really don't want him dictating my..."

Tonks cut him off saying, "Harry, he just asked to be kept informed."

Harry was getting hot under the collar. "It's not his damn business. He should have asked me to tell him, not get someone else to write a surveillance report about how I spend my days and nights."

Tonks angrily replied, "That's not for you to say." Immediately she regretted her words, knew that she was wrong, and also knew that she had gone too far. She walked out of the room and went into the loo.

To say that Harry was mad didn't begin to describe how he felt. He was sick of people nosing into and interfering in his life. He knew that tonight wasn't the time to make a stand on the issue, and that Tonks was simply doing what she'd been instructed to, but he wouldn't forget about it.

Dan went upstairs and Emma was still awake. She looked at him and softly observed, "It got a bit loud down there. Is everything all right?"

Dan replied, "Apparently Tonks has been reporting our activities to the schoolmaster."

"Really? He's a nosey old goat. I'd like to get him in my chair for an hour."

Dan smiled in agreement at her little joke. "Needless to say, Harry's more than a bit miffed about it."

Emma was miffed too and wondered out loud, "Why doesn't he transfer?"

Knowing that his love was on a roll Dan nodded, "Keep going."

Emma continued, "It sounds like there are nearly as many witches and wizards in Britain as dentists. It can't be the only wizards school in the world. Tuition obviously isn't an issue. Do you know what he left on our bed this afternoon?"

Without a clue where the conversation was headed, Dan replied, "No idea."

"A briefcase full of fifty pound notes. There's a case with a million in Sterling under our bed. There were some dollar notes in there as well."

"For what?"

Giving her husband a curious look, she reached under the bed, picked up a parchment and said, "He left a note. Take a look at this."

Dan took it and began reading.

Dear Dan and Emma,

Thank you so very much for taking me into your home and your lives. Words cannot express how much your love and kindness mean to me. Hermione and I had a wonderful time every day this holiday, both at you home and in Nice.

We feel very bad that you have to interrupt your lives so much and spend a year in the States. We asked the Gringotts goblins to exchange a bit of gold so the two of you would have some spending cash to enjoy your time. Please accept it and use it in the spirit that it was intended.

We love you both and your safety means everything to us.

Harry & Hermione.

PS - Mum, please don't make a big deal about this. Harry and I are in complete agreement on this.

Dan didn't know what to say. No quips, no clever comebacks. He looked at the note a second time and handed it back to Emma.

The irony of Harry's life was amazing to Dan. His parents were billionaires and he's the prophesized savior of their wizarding world. They get murdered, and a schoolmaster takes it upon himself to snatch their son away from his rightful guardian, and pawns him off to a home where he wasn't even wanted. The guardian goes off the deep end, gets thrown in a hellhole prison without a trial, and the

nosey schoolmaster apparently doesn't bother to check up on someone who's supposed to be so very important. He ended up being abused, starved and forced to wear rags his entire childhood. It didn't make sense. Why did he do it? Why did the wizarding government allow it? Why didn't anyone help him?

Neither of the dentists slept well that night, not due to the accommodations, which were fine, rather as two parents worrying about their children.

Harry woke early and asked Auror Church to accompany him to Gringotts. He explained that he wanted to have done and left the Head teller's private office carrying three sacks of gold two minutes later. Using a portkey, Harry and Church were back home before the others had awoken. Harry was met with the smell of delicious food being prepared. "Good morning, Master Harry," said Winky softly. "Here is a cup of coffee. You can have breakfast now or wait until the others have woken up."

Harry replied, "I'll wait a bit to eat."

"Hi Harry," said Hermione. "Can I talk with you for a few minutes?"

"What's up?" he asked, as she let him into the library and closed the door behind her.

Hermione took Harry's hand as she spoke. "Could we, I mean could you help the Weasleys out?"

Harry gave his love a kiss and replied, "We already have. As far as I'm concerned, it's your money too, at least as much as I have control over yet. You're authorized to take any amount out of my vault. You don't have to ask. To answer your question, I transferred 50,000 galleons into their family vault this morning and also withdrew enough gold, so that they could get things to wear today. I was hoping that you would help me with something."

"Anything. What can I do?"

Harry handed her the three sacks, and said, "Make them take it. The larger sack is for Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, the smaller sacks are for Ron and Ginny."

"I see," she said. "How much is in here?"

"The little ones are five hundred each and the bigger one has two thousand galleons."

"Can you, can we afford that much?"

"The money that I transferred to them is a week's interest on the cash that the goblins have invested for us. I don't want to rub their faces in it, because Ron gets offended so easily, but the money means nothing."

Hermione kissed his forehead and said, "They're in the kitchen. Let's go talk with them." They walked in to see that Molly was on a losing end of a battle of wills with Winky over the kitchen. Hermione said, "Please have a seat, Mrs. Weasley and join us for breakfast."

Reluctantly, Molly sat down between her and Arthur. As Winky was serving the plates, Hermione asked, "Mr. Weasley, could you do us a favor today?"

Arthur looked up from his plate and replied, "Of course Hermione. How can I help?"

Hermione met his eyes for a moment and said, "Can you please give these to Ginny and Ron. They'll need to get new things today, and Harry and I don't want to embarrass them."

Arthur looked at Molly who was about to say something in protest. He shook his head to stop her and replied. "Yes. Thank you."

Hermione smiled, and said, "Thank you. We also have one more for you. We know that you lost everything last night, and this won't come close to replacing the memories and love that you lost with your

home, but it will help with shoes and robes. Please accept it with the love that Harry and I send with it.”

Again, Arthur said, “Thank you.”

Molly was stunned by the generosity that the two had shown them, but knew if the circumstances were reversed, she would have done the same for Harry. With tears in her eyes, she said, “Thank you, dears.”

Harry said, “We also want you to stay here until your new home is ready.”

Arthur said, “It may be a while to arrange some loans. Are you certain that we wouldn’t be an imposition?”

Harry said, “I could never begin to repay the love that you’ve shown me over the years. The goblins at Gringotts will help you with anything that you might need. Just go see Griphook when you are ready.”

“Thank you both,” said Arthur, at a loss for words. They had no idea of the extent of his wealth.

Hermione and Harry gave them each a hug, and said “We have some arrangements that we need to work out with our parents today. We know that you have a lot of shopping that needs to be done. “We’ll have dinner at six if that would work for you?”

The two Weasleys just nodded in stunned appreciation.

Minerva was sick when she read the news that the burrow had been torched the night before. She had come to love an entire generation of the red-headed children roaming around the school and knew that Arthur didn’t have the means of getting his family back on their feet. The thought of two more students coming to school in a week dressed in third hand rags made her angry. In fifty-five years of teaching, she had managed to save some money. Helping them

seemed like a proper way of using some of it. She told Dumbledore that she would be back in an hour.

She saw Kingsley at Gringotts, who apparently had had the same idea. She filled out the little transfer form and waited at the teller window. She had given them 5,000 galleons, about a year's net salary. As she was walking out the door, she saw Hestia walking in.

On the way back to the castle she thought about the cruelty of the wizards and witches who had attempted to murder the Weasley family and had destroyed their home. It made her sick to think that she had most likely helped teach most of them and that they had turned out to be killers and arsonists.

Late that afternoon, Arthur, Molly, Ginny and Ron walked into Gringotts, each carrying bundles and packages that had been shrunk and lightened. Molly said, "We've gotten enough to get started with. We should put most of the rest into our vault. "We'll each keep twenty five galleons and put the rest away toward rebuilding our home." Ron and Ginny counted out the coins and dutifully gave the half empty sacks to their mother. The money in the sacks would cover the first term tuition.

They waited in the lobby as Molly and Arthur took the cart to visit their vault and see what they had to their name. They'd been able to save a bit over the summer, and had nearly a thousand Galleons in their account. The gold in the sacks would nearly double what they had. Arthur handed Griphook the key and he opened the door to the vault. When she looked in, Molly nearly fainted. Arthur asked, "How much is in there, and where did it come from?"

Griphook took a look at the balance sheet and said, "You have 62,212 Galleons. Witches and wizards have been making transfers into your vault all day."

"Who?"

At Harry's instruction the goblin gave no clue as to the specifics, only replying, "I'm not allowed to say. There have been quite a few. Will that be all?"

Arthur put the Galleons that Harry and Hermione had given them into the vault and got back into the cart where Molly was waiting. They took the trip back up to the lobby, and silently handed Ron and Ginny their bags back. Ginny asked a question, but Arthur just said, "I'll explain later."

A/N

Thanks for the great words of encouragement. It's good to be writing again.

Would McGonagall leave her position to help Harry?

Would the board of governors allow the school to take a position that it's not alright to be a junior Death Eater and stay in school?

HermioneTumbleweed has a great start to a story Raising Phoenix.
2907343

Chapter 18

After dinner, Hermione accompanied Ginny into her room to show her all of her new things. Hermione smiled sadly at the circumstances, but had been heartened to hear that so many witches and wizards had helped them out. It avoided an argument, even though Arthur was all but certain that Harry had contributed the lion's share of the gold.

As she was leaving, Ginny asked Hermione, "Will you do another favor for me, Hermione?"

She looked at her friend, and said, "Of course. How can I help?"

The lithe fireball replied, "Would you thank Harry properly for me? He'd probably fall over dead if I grabbed him and kissed him up and down like he deserves."

Hermione thought for a moment, smiled at the thought, and replied, "I don't know about the up and down part, but I'm certain that he'd appreciate a hug. We just didn't want you to be uncomfortable."

Ginny chuckled and replied, "I'm uncomfortable that Tom's goons tried to kill my entire family and burned our home down. I'm grateful that some people thought enough of us to help us out. Dad said that different people transferred over sixty thousand Galleons into our vault today. He can take a few weeks off from his job and he and mum can get a proper home designed and contracted. How could I be uncomfortable? I feel like the luckiest witch in Britain." Then with a sly smile she added, "Well, maybe the second luckiest witch." Smiling she added, "Thanks again Hermione."

As Hermione walked away, Ginny knew that most of the gold had most likely come from Harry, Hermione and the members of the Order. She counted her blessings as she fell asleep, knowing that at that moment, not all of her schoolmates had been so lucky.

The next day Harry and Hermione received an early morning visit from Minister Bones regarding the upcoming trials. She explained that there were three trials scheduled in the next three days. The first

was against the eleven Death Eaters captured in the Department of Mysteries

Thoughts of that evening came back to Harry as vividly as ever. Harry wanted Bones to know what had happened, and asked, "Minister, how much time do you have available today?"

Knowing that Harry wouldn't ask for anything trivial, she replied, "Harry, I have as much time as you need. I presume that there are some things that you want to tell me or show me. Is your solicitor pensive available?"

Harry went to get it. When he had left the room, Amelia asked, "Hermione, have you and Harry had a true confession discussion about that night yet?"

The young witch shook her head, and replied, "I was so drugged up with potions that school was over before I had a chance to talk with anyone. Harry never wanted to talk about that night other than to apologize repeatedly for leading us there. He didn't force us to go with him, rather we insisted that we all would go with him. I don't think that he's told anyone everything that happened."

Amelia asked, "Would you prefer to have your parents here with you as you go over this?"

Hermione replied, "I don't know how they would react to seeing their daughter struck down."

"Speaking for myself, if it had been Susan there, I would want to know, but the choice is yours. They will almost certainly attend tomorrow."

Harry walked back into the library, gathered the essence of the conversation and invited everyone to have a seat. He said, "Ginny and Ron were there too. Their parents have a right to see as well." Hermione nodded, and said, "I'll go gather everyone."

A few moments later, Molly, Arthur, Dan, Emma, Ron and Ginny joined them. Amelia said, "Good morning. I have come here to

preview the proceedings regarding the trials that will be held over the next three days. The Department of Mysteries trial to be held tomorrow, the attack against the Granger house, and a trial regarding Delores Umbridge will be held Wednesday, and the hearing regarding the attack against the Dursley house will be held Thursday.”

Harry didn’t understand, but Hermione who was just naturally quicker at these things asked, Minister, “I wasn’t aware that there had been any arrests regarding the murders of the Dursleys.”

Bones glanced at Harry, who obviously hadn’t heard anything either, and said, “We’ll come back to that later.

And so in ten minute snippets which was the limit of the memory size that Harry’s pensive would hold, they told the stories of the worst day of their lives. Beginning with Hermione’s memory of Harry’s planted vision attack during their History of Magic OWL exam, to Harry’s frantic fire call search for Sirius, to Umbridge’s confession that she had sent the dementors to get Harry, they showed their story. When they got to the Department of Mysteries on the thestrals via Hermione’s memory, it was obvious that they were accompanying their friend into a trap.

Dan and Emma had tears in their eyes as they watched the dozen masked Death Eaters confront the teens as they searched in vain for Sirius. As they watched the next ten minutes of the memory, the adults all came to the same conclusion regarding the teens – sheer nerve under pressure.

Molly broke into sobs as they watched Sirius fall through the veil. She would never forgive herself for chiding him regarding his parenting skills. She had seen her son attacked by those creatures, Ginny break her ankle, Hermione slashed with a fire brand, Neville battle on, Luna fall, and Harry fight against increasingly desperate odds.

As the image moved to the lobby, Harry suddenly stopped the pensive. He looked at Bones, who said, “Maybe we can take a short break while we sort things out.” The Weasleys got up and left the library, closing the door behind them. Amelia asked, “What is it Harry?”

Harry replied, "I chased after Bellatrix and I got carried away."

Amelia immediately understood. It happened too frequently in firefights. She asked, "Before you cast a curse at her, had she thrown one at you?"

"Several."

She looked at him and said, "You don't want the Weasley family to see the next part, do you?"

Harry shook his head. Tears of shame were running down his face.

She said, "I'll ask Molly to prepare something to serve. They can come back in twenty minutes. Will that be long enough?"

Harry nodded. Emma went up to Harry, put her hands on his shoulders, looked him in the eye, and said, "Harry, there is nothing else that we can see from that night that will lessen our opinion or our love for you one bit. Nothing. Do you understand? We watched in awe for the last two hours as you, Hermione, and your friends did what you had to do when faced with a horrible situation."

Amelia said, "Harry, you have not been charged with any crimes that may have taken place that evening, nor will you. Shall we continue?"

Harry withdrew two more strands and placed them into the swirling dish. Then he tapped the side to start the image, and they were again transfixed by the holographic image before them. Harry chased Bellatrix out of the room, dodging curses that she fired at him. When he got off the lift at the lobby, she began taunting him and it happened, "Crucio." She was knocked down by the force and began taunting him again for being unable to cast the torture curse. A moment later, Voldemort and Dumbledore appeared, and began fighting. Bones watched in awe over the casual attitude that Dumbledore battled Riddle until Riddle possessed Harry and taunted Dumbledore to kill them both.

Hermione was sobbing at the torture that her boyfriend had going through, and watched in utter disbelief as Harry exorcised Riddle from his mind, only to be harassed by Fudge moments later. Finally the image sank back into the dish.

After collecting her thoughts for a moment, she said, "Harry there are many rules of war. The muggles usually refer to them as rules of engagement. Some are logical, others seem absurd, like what kind of bullet you can use to kill an enemy with. In the wizarding world, it is illegal to cast the Cruciatus curse against another human being."

Harry said, "I know. I've had it used against me a handful of times."

Amelia's heart went out for the young man who had endured so much suffering in his life. She needed to put an end to this and move on, as she felt the worst was yet to come. She said, "Harry Potter, I fine you a thousand Galleons for use of an illegal curse while defending yourself. You have thirty days to pay the fine. After you pay the fine, the matter cannot be brought up in any court again. Do you understand the penalty?"

Harry looked at her and replied, "Yes Minister. I apologize."

She looked at him again, and said, "Good. Now that that is settled, I must first congratulate you. You are only the second living human being who has knocked Bellatrix Lestrange down with a spell. Secondly, I must echo Dr. Granger's words. No one in this room thinks one wit less of you now than we did before. You showed amazing courage and did what you had to do. Do you understand?"

Harry wiped his eyes with the sleeve of his robe and replied, "Yes Minister."

She replied, "I'd like to give you a few minutes to collect yourself before we continue. Would ten minutes be long enough?"

"Yes Minister."

They watched in pain, as Harry walked out of the room by himself. Hermione got up to go with him, but Dan held her back. "Just give him a moment to breathe, kiddo. He'll be all right."

Five minutes later, Harry walked back into the room. It was obvious that he'd been sick. He handed Bones a Gringotts draft. She took it from him and nodded.

Hermione looked at her dad, who nodded, and said, "Come on Harry. Let's get you cleaned up." She took his hand and led him upstairs. Ten minutes later, they walked back in together. The Weasleys were back in the room, seated. Ginny smiled and handed Harry and Hermione each a bottle of butterbeer.

With some trepidation, Amelia asked, "What is the last memory that we should see, Harry?"

Harry tapped his pensive once more, and the holographic image of Dumbledore's office appeared. Dumbledore gave his rationalizations regarding Sirius' imprisonment, and told of the prophecy. Molly, Arthur, and Amelia watched in horror as the ethereal image of Trelawney uttered the horrible words appointing Harry to battle Voldemort.

Dan and Emma watched helplessly as Dumbledore piled the weight of the world on Harry, then gave his reasoning for not telling him previously. They watched as silver instruments went flying and a table was knocked over. Finally the image shrank back into the bowl. The silence was deafening.

Moments passed and no one said anything. Finally the silence was broken when Ginny knocked over a half empty butterbeer bottle with her foot.

Molly and Ginny both bent over and said, "I'll get it."

Harry explained, "So that's why Riddle killed my parents, and has been trying to kill me for the last sixteen years. Someone heard the first two lines and told him. I would have thought that Dumbledore would have taken better care of his weapon."

Smack!

Ginny had walked over and slapped Harry. "You're nobody's weapon. You're Harry Potter, our friend, Hermione's boyfriend, Dr. Granger's adopted son, and an honorary Weasley. Dumbledore can take that weapon talk and shove it up his ancient arse. You ever talk that way again, and I'll hex you into tomorrow, you got that, Potter?"

Half in shock, Harry replied, "Yes, Ginny."

Dan asked, "If I may ask, what has your schoolmaster or the government done to prepare you to prevail and survive this prophesized conflict? Also, what is the wizarding world's interpretation of by his own hand?"

Amelia replied, "To my knowledge, Harry has received no special training, other than adventures of his own making. Tell me Harry, how many times have you faced Voldemort?"

Thinking for a moment, Harry replied, "Once as an infant, twice when I was eleven, and once when I was twelve. I dueled with him twice in the cemetery when I was fourteen, and once again last June. I reckon that's seven times."

Dan said, "There's a big difference between experience and training. It sounds like Harry has more experience than anyone fighting this madman. Where can he get some proper training? Professor Dumbledore has had five or fifteen years to act, depending on how you count it, and apparently hasn't provided any."

Ron broke in, and said, "The only extra training that I've received is what Harry has taken time to give to us."

There was a knock on the library door. Dumbledore walked in saying, "I heard that you were here Amelia. Might I have a word?"

"I'll be right back." She walked out of the library, and closed the doors behind her. Those closest to the door could hear some indistinct, loud words. Dobby popped in and brought another tray of beverages.

After five minutes, the doors reopened. Before Dumbledore could say anything, Dan stood and in a very businesslike tone asked, "Headmaster, does the Hogwarts standard curriculum offer any training that will specifically help Harry survive his next encounter with Voldemort?"

Dan had not left Dumbledore any wiggle room. Amelia was still a member of the board of governors and was perfectly familiar with the curriculum used by the school. Dumbledore replied, "Not specifically."

Before he could expound on his answer, Dan asked, "Do you have any specific knowledge to pass onto Harry that would be any more lethal for fighting Voldemort than shooting him with a shotgun or a sniper rifle, or having the military drop a bomb on his house?"

Molly gasped. She had never heard anyone directly challenge Dumbledore before with such impudence. Amelia hadn't either. She was rather enjoying herself.

Dumbledore replied, "The prophecy clearly states that either must die by the other's hand. I don't think having a Royal airman drop a bomb on his house qualifies."

Dan was livid. "Are you saying that if I were to take a pistol out and shoot my son right now that the bullet would just bounce off? Headmaster, are you that sure of yourself?"

Dumbledore thought for a moment and admitted, "No."

Dan was almost raging. "Headmaster, you broke the law taking Harry away from his rightful Godfather's care, driving him over the edge. You placed Harry in a home where he was unwanted, unwelcome, and abused for years. You left him completely in the dark regarding his resources, and his heritage. You left him completely in the dark regarding his prophesized destiny, and unless I'm completely wrong, you have no documented training regimen to help him live a full life. How in the world could you possibly expect that we would sit back and watch you bungle the next two years?"

Dan was nowhere near done with the old wizard. “You claimed that this is the second time that Voldemort has tried to rise to power. Was your plan to have Harry the infant end that war too? What was he supposed to do – blast him with a bad pair of nappies?”

Dumbledore had been called many things in his extensive lifetime, but he had never been humbled before by a pair of stinky nappies. “Dr. Granger, I assure you...”

Dan would not be swayed, and replied, “Right now, you couldn’t assure me about the certainty of death or taxes. If you know the name of a few tutors that we can hire, I would be very interested. Otherwise, please leave us alone, and take your little informant with you.”

Amelia didn’t miss his words. “What informant?”

“The bodyguard, Tonks.”

Bones was almost as livid as the dental surgeon. “Auror Tonks.” No one could have missed her voice, regardless of the size of the house.

She arrived thirty seconds later. “Yes Minister?”

“Auror Tonks, have you been informing on the whereabouts and activity of the people that you were assigned to guard, despite written instructions specifically prohibiting you to do so?”

Tonks was a lot of things, and by no means an angel, but she was not a liar. She clearly replied, “Yes Minister.” Dumbledore cringed.

“Tonks, you’re sacked. Turn in you badge and identification card before the end of your shift.” She nodded, turned, and walked away.

Dumbledore softly said, “Excuse me Minister, but strictly speaking, you can’t sack Miss Tonks. Only Director Hammer or the Wizengamot can do so.”

“Fine. Tonks, I expect to see both you and Director Hammer in my office this afternoon at four. If you have no other business, Professor,

I suggest that you return to the castle. Please close the door on your way out."

Amelia took a minute to compose herself. She was so disappointed in Tonks, who had assured her that she would leave her Auror business separate from her participation in Dumbledore's militia. She said, "I want to thank each of you for your patience, co-operation and complete honesty. It is my intent that none of the men who you helped capture will ever walk the street again. There will be two cars and a detail to escort you to the Ministry tomorrow. Can you be ready to leave by 7:00AM?"

Everyone nodded. She replied, "I'll see you tomorrow." She turned and walked away.

Harry turned to Molly and asked, "Mrs. Weasley, I apologize for having to ask, but I think you can see why I'm asking. Were you or Mr. Weasley asked to keep tabs on me, and report back to the Professor?"

There was an uncomfortable silence. Molly looked at Arthur, who shook his head. She replied, "I'm sorry that you had to ask Harry, and I want you to know that we respect your privacy. We've said nothing regarding your whereabouts or activities since the day you spoke with Arthur on 5 July."

Ginny and Ron shook their heads. Ron had come to realize that for most of his life, and at least the foreseeable future, being Harry Potter stunk.

After lunch, Dan and Emma drove the Weasleys to the local mall to do a bit more shopping. They returned about dinnertime each carrying sacks and shopping bags. While they had been waiting for the Weasleys to pick out several sets of muggle clothing each, Dan and Emma discussed their declining interest in having either of their children return to Hogwarts in two weeks. From what they knew of wizarding law, once a child had completed their fifth year and had taken their OWL exams, they were not required to continue school.

On the flip side, the wizarding world was not required to educate a sixth or seventh year witch or wizard if there was just cause, either at Hogwarts or one of the lesser wizarding schools.

Lunchtime at Hogwarts was quiet. Moody had previously warned Dumbledore to not press Tonks for details regarding the Grangers or Harry. The two men sat having lunch in companionable silence. Moody had stopped just short of saying "I told you so," when he heard about Tonks' troubles.

Minerva had caught enough of the conversation to have gathered what had happened. Entering their conversation uninvited, she said, "Dumbledore, you're doing it again. Harry's as angry at you for hovering over him this holiday as he was that you ignored him with those awful people for all those years."

She too decided to give him an earful. "Albus, Molly and Arthur have been your friends for nearly forty years. Did it occur to you to take a minute and inquire if they had the means to rebuild their home?"

Moody was silent, thinking, 'Old friend, you boned the pooch this time.'

McGonagall continued, "You were specifically told to keep away from Harry and Hermione except on school business. Amelia let it slide that you crashed his birthday party. You took that as a green light to barge into his home uninvited today. Did you even bother to knock at the door?"

Dumbledore knew better than to interrupt while she was storming.

"I'd be very surprised if the Grangers weren't seriously considering pulling their children from school at this very moment."

In her anger, she spilled her water goblet on the table. Without a word, Dumbledore waved his hand and dried the spill. Deep down, he knew that she was right, or at least had valid points for everything that she said. She didn't grind the ax, but she had made her mark. He

sincerely hoped that Dr. Granger was not thinking about pulling the two teens that were so important to his plans.

Despite Bone's call for dismissal, Connie Church placed Auror Tonks on disciplinary probation with cause. This was a serious blemish on her record that would follow her for the remainder of her career as an Auror. On the other hand, Tonks went back to her flat that evening still wearing the burgundy Auror robes and carrying her badge. She wrote a letter of apology to Harry and the Grangers to give to them the next day at the trials.

That evening Arthur and Molly left to go visit with the building contractor. They revised the plans from the original burrow to have a second bathroom, larger kitchen, larger family room and another bedroom. In total it would have the space of one of the floors of Harry's home, but it felt quite expansive to Molly and Arthur. Work could begin in a week, and be done two or three weeks after they had begun. The contractor had estimated that they could complete the construction for 35,000 galleons, quite a bit more than Tonks had estimated, but within their current means, leaving them with about 25,000 galleons to furnish their home. Again they thanked their lucky stars that no one was killed, and that they had made lifelong friends who had willingly come to their aid.

Everyone got up about 5:30 the next morning. Winky had breakfast ready by 6:00 and an hour later everyone was ready. With Hermione's pleading, Dan and Emma each dressed in a set of slate gray robes that Harry had purchased for them. He wanted them to appear as inconspicuous as possible.

Shepard and O'Hearn drove. The adults and another Auror rode in one car, while the teens and Church rode in the other car. Hermione held Harry's hand on the way, and the conversation was quiet. Each was glad that Bones had come over the day before to prep them.

Three at a time, they took the visitors entrance to the ministry. Crammed into the telephone booth, Harry felt a sense of dread as he entered the lobby. The Magical Brethren statue had been replaced, as had Eric the visitor entrance guard who had been sacked for letting Voldemort and twelve Death Eaters into the building on his watch.

Arthur and the Aurors led them down to courtroom number ten – the same courtroom where Harry himself had stood trial a year before. The other witnesses were already there. Harry nodded at Neville, who was sitting near his Grandmother and Luna, who was sitting silently next to her father. As a point of interest, Harry noticed that Mr. Lovegood was the only media person there. There were no spectators per se. Harry noticed a few witches at the other side of the courtroom, one of whom he recognized as Narcissa Malfoy. Harry inconspicuously pointed her out to Hermione.

Bones and Hammer arrived shortly after Harry and the others had sat down. She gave Harry the slightest nod and shuffled through her paperwork.

Finally the Wizengamot judges filed in. There were only 48 seated judges as Umbridge and Michelle Edgecombe's positions had not yet been filled pending their own trials.

One by one the prisoners were led out, and placed in the chained chairs. As they sat down, the chains wound themselves around their arms and legs. Harry looked at the men impassionedly. Nott, Jugson, Rodolphus Lestrage, Crabbe, Rabastan, McNair who had tried to kill Buckbeak, Avery, Rookwood, and Mulciber. He really didn't know these men and held no personal grudge against them. Finally at the end, he spotted Anton Dolohov who had tried to murder Hermione, and Lucius Malfoy who had tried to kill them all.

One by one, they were charged, with their common and individual crimes. One by one the witnesses were called. First Hermione, then Neville, then Ron, then Ginny, then Remus, then Moody gave their testimony.

Finally it was Harry's turn. He answered Amelia's questions but did not volunteer any information that she had not asked. She didn't ask anything regarding his duel with Bellatrix, and only asked one question regarding his witnessing of Voldemort fighting with Dumbledore.

There was no real doubt of their guilt or innocence. Bones and Hammer seemed intent on charging them, and collectively finding them guilty on as wide a variety of crimes as possible - For what exact purpose, Harry could not see.

Additional witnesses were called in regarding Malfoy's dealing with ministry officials. Hammer called a second witness regarding McNair's activities. Harry expected that each witness's had been testimony had been rehearsed or at least reviewed as Harry's had been. Bones seemed to be following the rule, Never ask a question that you don't already know the answer to. From her perspective, there were no surprises.

Dan and Emma watched the trial unfold with rapt fascination. Held at a much faster pace than their American counterparts, indeed much faster than the normal British hearings, Bones and Hammer painted a clear picture of the men's involvement in years of organized crime. By the short noon break, it was obvious that the evidence against them was damning. By two PM, she was involved in summation of the damages that the men had caused.

At three PM, Dumbledore, who ultimately proceeded over the trial, asked the defense solicitor if he had any questions for any of the witnesses or witnesses of his own.

It seemed that only Malfoy had prepared any sort of defense. He claimed that he was acting under the Imperius curse, and cited a lifelong list of good deeds that he had done. He was less able to explain how his Death Eater mask happened to have his name on the back.

The defense solicitor called Harry back to the witness stand.

“Mr. Potter, You previously stated that it was your opinion that there was no way that my client Lucius Malfoy could have been acting under the Imperius curse the night that you met in the Ministry of magic. How can you be so sure?”

Harry replied, “Well, Mr. Whopper, One of Voldemort’s Death Eaters had infiltrated Hogwarts and was impersonating a professor for most of my fourth year. He taught us the Imperius curse, and placed it on us so we could attempt to break it. He specifically told us that you could notice the difference in a person’s eyes.”

Whopper didn’t like Potter’s answer and made another mistake, asking, “So I suppose that you are an expert on having the Imperius curse cast on you?”

Harry replied, “Voldemort tried to cast it on me twice in one night. I believe that I’ve had my share of experience and training regarding that curse. Yes.”

Whopper knew that no one would believe that Malfoy had been controlled to lead a raid and tried a different tactic. “Mr. Potter, are you familiar with the Cruciatus curse?”

Harry replied, “Yes. I’ve had that cast at me about a dozen times and have been hit with it several times. In fact Voldemort has hit me with each of the unforgivables at one time or another.” There was some tittering in the audience, but Harry knew that he was on thin ice.

Whopper asked, “Mr. Potter, have you ever cast the Cruciatus curse on anyone?”

Bones started to get up, but Harry beat her. “Sir, my actions over my lifetime have been thoroughly reviewed, and documented, probably more than any wizard in Britain. When appropriate, I have paid my fines. If you have any witnesses that are here in this room to dispute my words, please bring them forth. Will that be all, Mr. Whopper?” The big bluff seemed to have worked. Whopper looked flustered.

Whopper couldn’t produce Bellatrix, and knew that he would lose his license to practice if he pushed the issue any farther. Besides, Potter

wasn't the one on trial. Potter had been coached too well. He replied, "No more questions."

At 3:30 the proceeding broke for deliberation, to determine guilt and fines. The guilt aspect would be handled by a simple vote for the ten men and a separate vote for Malfoy who had requested a separate vote. They both ended up 45-2, with Dumbledore abstaining, as he was acting in Bone's place as head of proceedings in this trial.

When it came to the punitive phase of the trial, it became obvious what Bones tactic had been. Wizarding law was such that a person convicted of will damage to property while committing a crime was punishable by ten times the value of the damage. Bribing an official had a similar clause, except the penalty was a hundred times the amount involved. She had in effect set up a set of charges that would not only send them back to prison or through the veil, but drain their bank accounts which in Malfoy's case had just as much potential to do damage as he did.

As Dumbledore looked at the final tally sheet that the finance subcommittee had presented, he was staggered – Four hundred million Galleons, over half of which was assessable against the Malfoy estate! Further, Bones had offered the Gringotts goblins a twenty percent finders fee to locate properties and vaults that were held in factious names or dummy corporations. He had wondered why Draco had posthumously been charged with three counts of arson for the hearing later in the week.

Each of the men was sentenced to a life in Azkaban. The escaped prisoners were sentenced to the veil. As the sentences were read, there was a grim satisfaction on the faces of the witnesses and the few spectators. As they were being led out, Malfoy shouted coldly, "My son will avenge me."

Bones simply replied, "Mr. Malfoy, Your son is dead. He got himself killed last month." She turned and walked away.

The Weasleys rode in one car on the way home and Harry and the Granger rode in the other car. Harry commented that neither Tonks nor Kingsley had been called to testify.

Hermione replied, "They're damaged goods. Auror Tonks is on probation, and Kingsley had been dismissed. You and Neville both testified that LeStrange killed your Godfather. They presented the wands tested for the last spells that they had cast, so they had their witnesses, and they had their smoking guns. What else did she need?"

When they got home and were eating dinner, Dan asked Arthur, "Excuse me for asking, but in general terms, how much do wizards make?" The salaries for government paid workers were published information, so it really wasn't too foreword of a question.

Arthur replied, "An entry-level clerical position right out of Hogwarts might start at 3,900 Galleons a year. Someone with top grades might start at 4,250. The Minister of Magic might pull in 32,000. A Hogwarts professor might bring in 10,000. The better money can be made in owning a business. I expect that my sons Fred and George will be wealthy men in a few years. Bill is doing well at Gringotts, as they pay a bonus." He finished saying, "It's probably the same in the nonmagical world."

Dan nodded and replied, "Similar, except the government seems to collect most of the money for taxes." Both men nodded and smiled. Then he commented, "So the money collected today would seemingly go a long way to fund the government this year."

Arthur nodded, and replied, "Yes but assessing the fines and collecting them are two separate things. The Malfoys, Dolohovs and Mulcibers are, or were wealthy families. I doubt that Peter Crabbe ever had a chamber pot to his name, at least one that wasn't stolen. I believe that it is realistic that the Ministry will eventually collect half of what had been assessed today. The goblins will be highly motivated to help with the research."

Neither Harry nor the Grangers slept well that evening. Hermione came in to Harry's room early to give him a wakeup kiss, but saw him staring at the fireplace when she cracked the door open. She said, in a soft voice, "Hi Harry. Could I come in?" He nodded and she went to sit by him, leaving the door open. She took his hand, and gently placed it on her left breast, and said, "I love you. We'll get through this."

Harry smiled at her and a minute later gently held her head with both hands and said, "I love you too. There's something that you need to know. It's really important."

"What?"

"I'm almost certain that Snape didn't die from the spell that you shot at him."

A/N

Time seems to be running out for the Professor to clear things up with Harry and Hermione? How could he do it ? Would he?

Chapter 19

She gave him the last response that he would have expected in the world. "I know."

At the same time they both said, "But I didn't want you to feel bad."

At the same time, they said, "Oh."

Harry said, "He made a request that he be kept out of Azkaban."

Hermione was surprised that this could have been some sort of mercy killing. She asked, "Really? Who did you hear that from?"

Harry replied, "Professor Dumbledore mentioned it the other day. Who did you get your information from?"

"Myself. Mum and I estimated how much blood restorative potion that he'd taken. If he'd had a reaction such as cardio cessation, it should have happened by six AM."

Harry loved his girlfriend, but wished that she'd use regular words more often. He asked, "What?"

Hermione switched out of library mode back into regular conversation mode. "If his heart was going to stop because he'd had too much potion in his system, it should have happened by 6:00 or 7:00AM at the latest. His shoulder wound in and of itself should have been unrelated to his heart stopping. So who do you think killed him?"

Harry replied, "I'd prefer to believe that it was one of the other Death Eaters who did him in." He looked at her and they both hoped that the opposite wasn't true.

After the hearing regarding the attack on the Grangers, Harry was as disillusioned with the wizarding judicial process as he could be. Harry wondered why Professor McGonagall had been there. She had nodded to them acknowledging their presence before the hearing, but had left immediately after the hearing, seemingly angry about something.

There had been no mention of the cause of Snape's death, with the obvious implication that Hermione had indeed taken the life of Death Eater Severus Snape. On the other hand, there was no mention that Snape was anything but a Death Eater. There was no mention of the Order, or that he may have done redeeming work for the light side. The only real purpose seemed to have been to drag Draco Malfoy's name through the mud and assess both estates 50,000 Galleons.

The afternoon trial was open to spectators. It seemed that the entire DA was there to watch. The former High Inquisitor was charged with two counts of attempted murder, and eleven counts of criminal abuse.

The ten weeks since Harry had last seen Umbridge, running away while getting whacked by Peeves with a walking stick, had not been kind to her. She appeared to have lost thirty pounds while in captivity and looked quite ill. Her change in appearance hadn't softened anyone's feelings towards her.

Harry showed three pensive memories - being attacked by the dementors, in detention having to use a blood quill, and Umbridge's confession of having sent the dementors after Harry. Ernie Macmillan showed a similar memory.

Umbridge said nothing in her defense. She had resigned herself to spending the rest of her life in Azkaban. She eventually received a sentence of twenty-one years in Azkaban and a fine of 11,000 Galleons. Each evening that she had placed Harry or Ernie in detention and subjected them to a blood quill would cost her a year of her life and a thousand Galleons. Harry hoped that she thought it was worth it.

Harry and Hermione visited with the other students for a few minutes after the trial was over. Dumbledore hadn't spoken to him after the end of either of the day's sessions. Harry felt like the Ministry had done little but use his and Hermione's names to collect taxes.

The last trial was something of a surprise to Harry. Goyle's father, and Travers had been captured. Goyle had named Lestrage, and Pettigrew among the other raiders. Under Veritaserum, he acknowledged that Pettigrew had been a Death Eater all along, and had been in Voldemort's inner circle since Voldemort's rebirth.

Harry hoped that his acknowledgement of Pettigrew would be enough to clear his Godfather's name.

Each man had been sentenced to life in Azkaban. Even with the goblins guarding the facility, Harry wasn't sure what that really meant. He had little faith that the goblins could defend Azkaban against an organized attack on the prison.

That evening, Dumbledore sat in his round office and reread the letter that he had received.

Dear Professor Dumbledore.

It is with great regret that I tender my resignation as a member of the Order of the Phoenix. I certainly support the cause, but believe that I would be best suited to fight the dark side while employed as an Auror. It had been made abundantly clear to me this year that I cannot do both. I'm sorry that I couldn't serve you better.

I wish you good health and success in your endeavors.

Tonks

Dumbledore believed that Tonks' resignation was but the tip of the iceberg. Hestia would certainly follow, and his recruiting efforts within the Ministry would grind to a halt.

He reconsidered the words that Harry's guardian had challenged him with earlier in the week. He withdrew a thin strand from the side of his head, placed it in his pensive and watched the image.

Dumbledore replied, "The prophecy clearly states that either must die by the other's hand. I don't think having a Royal airman drop a bomb on his house qualifies."

Dan was livid. "Are you saying that if I were to take a pistol out and shoot my son right now that the bullet would just bounce off? Headmaster, are you that sure of yourself?"

Dumbledore thought for a moment and replied, "No."

Dan was almost raging. "Headmaster, you broke the law taking Harry away from his rightful Godfather's care, driving him over the edge. You placed Harry in a home where he was unwanted, unwelcome, and abused for years. You left him completely in the dark regarding his resources, and his heritage. You left him completely in the dark regarding his prophesized destiny, and unless I'm completely wrong, you have no documented training regimen to help him live a full life. How in the world could you possibly expect that we would sit back and watch you bungle the next two years?"

Dan was nowhere near done with the old wizard. "You claimed that this is the second time that Voldemort has tried to rise to power. Was your plan to have Harry the infant end that war too? What was he supposed to do – blast him with a bad pair of nappies?"

Dumbledore considered two lines – For either must die at the other's hand...Will have a power that he knows not. There were several implications - No one else could kill either Riddle or Harry. Dumbledore shuddered at the test that Dr. Granger had proposed. A slight restatement would be that one or the other would kill the other, not that they couldn't be killed.

He will have a power that the other knows not. That could be interpreted as a power or skill. One possible implication would be that Harry could learn marksmanship or other skill that Riddle doesn't personally know, and kill him using it. Another is that he could use an existing skill that Riddle doesn't know about and kill Riddle using it.

By his own hand was also open to interpretation. Harry could use a fist, or choke him at one level, use a wand, or wandless magic to cast a spell, or pull a trigger.

Regarding Granger's other remarks, Albus could do little but agree with his assessments of the past and current situation. The light side was losing badly until the evening of 31 October, 1981, and aside from the battle at the Department of Mysteries, was again losing badly this time. He smiled for a moment at the mental image of Riddle choking on a pair of stinky nappies. Dr. Granger certainly had conviction, and obviously cared deeply for Harry.

When challenged to produce his written plan, Dumbledore had originally been insulted, but had to admit that he had yet to put quill to parchment and write anything down. His biggest concern was that the Grangers would act prematurely, and strike out on their own.

While Dumbledore was doing his contemplations, Dan, Harry and the women were having their own conversation. Their options were virtually limitless - they could live anywhere, acquire the services of any tutor, hire a private army, have complete cooperation from the Minister of Magic, or they could return to Hogwarts to attend sixth year classes at a school that had proven dangerous to them four out of the five years that they had attended.

Emma replied, "Hermione, you don't have to do anything. First and foremost, you two owe it to yourselves to stay alive and healthy. You know that we have our biases, and we wouldn't be offended in the least if you asked for a second or third opinion. Whose advice would you seek?"

Hermione said, "I think we should talk with Professor McGonagall, Remus Lupin, and Amelia Bones." Everyone nodded in agreement. Hermione winked at her boyfriend and said, "Harry you should make the call. No one in the wizarding world would put you on hold." Everyone smiled at the truth. Harry also wrote notes to McGonagall and Lupin and gave them to Hedwig to send. Remus was invited

Friday morning, Minerva Friday afternoon, Bones Saturday morning and Dumbledore on Monday morning.

Remus reread the letter from Harry.

Dear Remus,

Hermione and I have been giving much consideration to our future and how we could best prepare for it. We are considering our options for the next few years at Hogwarts or outside of Hogwarts. Neither of us believes that the standard sixth or seventh year classes will help us defeat Riddle. We have always respected your opinion and ideas and were hoping that we could meet with you Friday 23 August at 8:00 AM.

Thank you.

Harry and Hermione

Remus was shocked that their relationship with Dumbledore had become so badly eroded. Despite some noise to the contrary, Dumbledore always carried on as if he had everything completely under control. Remus thought there were several shades of gray between putting a good face on a situation in front of the troops and self-delusion. He felt that the Professor might be on the far side of the scale. He penned a reply that he would be there the following morning and began thinking of alternatives for his friend's son.

Minerva was saddened to read the letter that Hedwig had delivered, but like Remus, was not really surprised. She briefly considered showing the letter to Albus, but changed her mind. Enough people had broken Harry's trust during the last year, and that was not a list of people that she wished to join.

Reconsidering her first career discussion with Harry, she concluded that he wasn't likely to go into law enforcement as a career, and in

the chance that he prevailed in his encounters with he-who-must, no Voldemort; Hermione would most likely have other ideas regarding how he should spend his time.

She thought for a moment – What did he really need? Certainly he needed highly specialized training on dueling with Voldemort. She vowed to herself never to refer to him by anything rather than a proper name. If Potter could muster the courage to hunt him down, she could at least have the fortitude to call that monster by his name.

She considered the former students that she knew of who might be of help to Harry. Michael Wood and Alastor Moody came to mind, but Michael was dead. She wrote her reply and sent the beautiful owl back on her way.

She also concluded that he needed some financial management training to help with his estate management. Hogwarts was poorly equipped to help in that area.

Amelia had quickly agreed to Harry's requested meeting and wrote the time in her appointment book. If Harry was seriously asking for alternatives, she would do her best to present him with a wide variety of options.

She reconsidered the lecture that Dr. Granger had given to Dumbledore. Why not just bomb his house? She had read briefings from her counterparts in the Royal air force about smart bombs that had been developed. Voldemort and his Death Eaters certainly qualified as an international terrorist organization. Could she get the special services involved?

She recalled the smug look that Malfoy had on his face while being led out of the courtroom – how it had vanished the second that she informed him that his arrogant brat of a son had preceded him in death. If half the stories that Susan had told her about him were true it was just as well that the family line ended where it had.

She held the conviction that they would win this war and provide a generation of peace within the wizarding world for Susan and the witches and wizards of their generation. Hopefully it would allow the wizarding world time to get its head out of its arse and embrace the technology that the nonmagical world provided. Owls...really. Email and mobile telephones were so obviously superior.

That evening Dan and Emma were walking together in the park that was behind the row houses of Grimmauld Place. Dan asked, "What can we do to best help the kids?"

Emma replied, "One thing's for certain, we can't fight their war for them, not that they appear to need much help. I think we should find someone who is military retired to consult with. I suspect that Minister Bones could identify such a person."

They held hands as they walked. This summer had brought them closer together than they had been for years. They were both desperately hoping that their family would still be as close a year from now.

They had tried very hard to separate the emotions and the facts when guiding their children, glad that they had sought out the counsel of others. Ultimately, they had reached the stage in their lives where they were making ninety five percent of their own decisions.

Friday morning at eight, Dobby showed Remus into the library. After greeting everyone and getting a coffee, juice, tea and butterbeer from Winky, Remus began. "I'm sorry that the times and situation are such where the two of you would need to consider an education that Hogwarts might not be able to provide. More than the specific curriculum, it distresses me that Professor Dumbledore let your relationships slip as badly as they obviously have. Getting to point, what is it that the two of you believe that you will need to know both short term and long term?"

Harry was getting ready to say something, but Hermione spoke first. "Professor, short term we need to learn how to kill Voldemort and stay alive. Long term, we need to be able to manage Harry's estate. With respect to Voldemort, I think we would be safer trying some distance methods first rather than a face to face wizards duel."

Remus was curious. "What do you mean by distance methods?"

Hermione replied, "While we were on the plane home from Nice I read an article about a 50 calibre sniper rifle that had an effective range of 3,000 yards. That's over a mile. The slug itself is the size of my finger. He would never hear the sound of the rifle and probably never even notice if Harry missed."

Remus was not the only one amazed that the depth and breadth of knowledge that the young woman displayed. He merely could say, "Go on."

Hermione continued, "The hard part would be to think of a location where he would likely be that had an unobstructed view from a safe distance. It's more likely that he would have a shield spell around him that shielded against magical attacks than physical objects. I think that killing him that way would still satisfy the terms of the prophecy."

Dan had heard about snipers and understood the idea at least in general terms. The idea of a rifle that could reach out and touch someone from over a mile away was amazing to him. He asked, "How far do regular spells go?"

Remus replied, "It's not so much the distance as the ability to aim. If you were to compare the range and accuracy of a normal rifle compared to a revolver, you would have a reasonable comparison. Keep in mind that a wizard can almost instantly apparate from one place to another, so being able to strike him from a concealed location would be a great advantage."

Harry replied, "We could go to his home in Little Hangleton or wait for him to come to either Hogsmeade, Diagon Alley or Hogsmeade."

Dan asked, "If you know where he lives, why not just bomb his home?"

No one had a good answer, but felt that Amelia might be in a position to consider it.

Remus got people back on track. "Hermione and Harry, your letter indicated that you both were considering dropping out of school. Do you really feel that doing so would be in your best interests?"

Emma replied, "Mr. Lupin, nothing in the world would give me greater pleasure at this moment than to have Director Bones walk through the door and inform us that Voldemort was run over by a lorry and had died instantly. Everyone in this room wants nothing more than for Hermione and Harry to have a long and happy life together. It appears that they won't be able to live their lives until that monster is killed off. If you have another alternative, please say it."

Unfortunately Remus didn't have a better idea. The idea of challenging Voldemort to a proper wizards duel and firing curses at each other from a distance of twenty yards sounded like suicide. He replied, "I don't have a better idea at this moment. If there's any way in the world that I could help you, please know that I will."

They all knew that the meeting was over, and parted as friends. Remus promised not to mention their meeting to Dumbledore.

Minerva tried to offer something other than an either-or recommendation. She certainly understood that Hogwarts did not offer advanced dueling, or assassination techniques, or estate management at the level that the two were seeking, but felt that they could also benefit from at least some of the standard courses that Hogwarts could offer them. She recommended that they consider taking the minimum number of classes and work with Alastor, and others two days a week.

Dan asked if it would be possible for them to take a semester or two off and return later if they choose.

Minerva replied, "Dr. Granger, if Harry and Hermione are successful, they'll be able to do anything that they wish to." The unspoken portion was if they weren't, the issue was moot.

Dan and Emma left the library and went out to the park to let the teens converse a bit more with their professor.

Hermione continued, "Professor, we're seriously considering hiring several professors and someone with military experience that can help us. Might you know of anyone who could help for the transfiguration and charms aspects?" Hermione was definitely fishing and curious to see what the result would be.

Rather than show her hand, Minerva asked, "Where are the two of you thinking of living?"

Harry replied, "I'm told that I own seventeen homes counting this one. I believe that Director Hammer will allow us to test for our apparition licenses today if we ask for it. If we elect to go that route, we will look for the location that offers us safety as well as sufficient space and privacy to practice what we need to. Would you be interested in helping us?"

Minerva replied, "I would consider your request very carefully if you get to the point of striking off on your own. I also would do what I could to help you if you both elect to return to Hogwarts. I know that the two of you are trying to change the course of the wizarding world, and I know that your cause is worthy. I trust that this conversation will go no further than your parents. I wish you both the very best, no matter which path you choose."

Hermione recognized the magnitude of what McGonagall was offering to give up for them. The young woman hugged her mentor and said, "We can't thank you enough."

About the time that Hermione was thanking McGonagall, Amelia Bones returned from her meetings with her counterparts. She

explained that the terrorist cell known as black vipers were raising havoc in various parts of Britain and they would need assistance in eliminating the threat.

Tomorrow morning she would be meeting with Potter who would almost certainly be asking for help and advice. She silently cursed Fudge for his corruption and unwillingness to face unpleasant decisions throughout his career.

In reality, Riddle was as strong as he was today largely because the infrastructure that had supported him during his first rise to power had been left almost untouched. She wished that Barty Crouch hadn't been sidelined over the poor decisions of his own son all those years ago. He would have made a more effective Minister than Fudge had ever been, and twenty five of Voldemort's strongest supporters wouldn't have walked away free men using that ridiculous "I was under the Imperius curse all those years line."

'Another twist of fate,' she thought to herself. His infrastructure remained intact and had grown amazingly strong financially. Malfoy and the others maintained stewardship of fortunes that had largely never belonged to them. It was no wonder that arrogant Draco grew up thinking that he was the uncrowned prince of Sussex county. It had probably never occurred to him that the millions that his father had squirreled away out of the Ministry funds had been stolen.

She wondered if Malfoy had had mixed feelings that night fourteen months ago when he and the others had been called back into Voldemort's service. 'Perhaps the steward had begun viewing those funds as his own'? She would probably never know.

Sunday morning began as another glorious summer day. Harry and the Grangers went for an early morning walk in the park with Church following along. She wondered what path Potter was planning on taking. Her original assignment was scheduled to end in a week, and while Potter and the Doctors had taken the time to be excellent hosts, a part of her was looking forward to returning to her regular duties.

Ron and Ginny visited together at the former and future site of the burrow. Ginny asked, "Do you think they're serious about not going back to school?"

"No way. They'll be back," replied Ron.

"Remember what Hermione said last night?"

"No. I was watching that telly vision device. What did Hermione say?"

Frustrated, Ginny told him, She said "We wanted to let you know that we are considering our options for the fall and there is a possibility that we will not be returning to Hogwarts. Harry and I both believe that the subjects that would help us the most in the coming year are not those that the school can offer. As such, we are looking at private tutors either on a full time basis, which would cause us to withdraw from school, or on a part-time basis, which might allow us to remain at Hogwarts. Please respect our wishes on this and don't mention it to anyone."

Ron was almost in a panic. "Who will we eat with? Who will help me with my homework?"

"Ron, you're a prat," said Ginny. "Can't you think of anyone but yourself?" She stood to face her brother. "They must be feeling crushed from the weight of the world that's been laid on them and you're worried about who will sit by you at the lunch table. Lavender will sit by you. Neville will help you with your homework if you asked him. Now that the really urgent issues have been discussed, can we figure out a way to help Hermione and Harry?"

"What should we do?" asked Ron.

"They said they were busy tomorrow and we'll have to help Mum and Dad again on Monday. Let's talk with them Monday night."

"OK."

Amelia arrived right on time. Dobby showed her in, while Winky served tea biscuits. She began, "Based on your telephone conversation, I did some checking with my colleagues at the other branches of government. It would be possible to attend specialized training at the Basingbourn facility. They could provide training in basic marksmanship, and then specialized training in either the L96 sniper rifle or the 50-calibre rifle that you mentioned in your telephone conversation. Between the stealth techniques that they could train you on and those available in the wizarding world, you could remain hidden for a long period of time."

Dan considered her words for a moment and replied, "Hitting him would be one thing, getting him out in the open might be another."

Emma remained silent as Bones and Dan discussed assassination logistics in the same manner as they might discuss a filling technique. For Harry and Hermione, it was a bit more personal. They, or at least Harry would be the one to kill or be killed. She held both of her children's hands and prayed that he would somehow be successful in his awful task.

Finally they finished, and Hermione asked if she knew anyone that might be able to assist them in estate and investment management. Amelia replied, "Auror Tonks' father works in that field. I will find a telephone number for him and let you know. Is there anything else? If not, please contact me in the next few days and let me know how I might be able to help."

"Thank you, Minister," said Harry. "We all appreciate your candor and the work that you've done."

Bones replied, "It is I who needs to be thanking the four of you. Enjoy your day."

"Cheers," replied Dan.

Sunday noon found Dan and Harry finishing their round. Emma and Hermione had gone with, not to play, but to be with their men. They both smiled at the friendship that had developed between Dan and Harry. It was inconceivable to Hermione what attracted them to the game, but they both obviously loved it.

Afterward they went out for a nice lunch along with Auror Shepard who was guarding them for the day. Harry had come to enjoy pepperoni pizza. The Dursleys had never taken him out to a Pizza Hit, or any restaurant for that matter. Harry wished that the Weasleys could have come with, but respected that they had a lot of work of their own to do planning their home.

As the women were coming back from the salad bar Dan said, "Emma and I will respect any decision that you and Hermione arrive at. If you want to go back to school in Scotland, we'll stay here or go to the States. If you want us nearby we'll be there for you."

"Thanks," said Harry. Dan knew that he meant it.

Harry continued, "Perhaps the professor will have thought up a better plan and be willing to tell us about it." Dan waited in silence for a moment to let him continue. Hermione would know more about it, but he..."

"I'd know more about what?" asked the bright eyed, bushy haired young woman.

"How Dumbledore finished off Grindelwald," answered Harry.

"You could ask him about the details, but Grindelwald was killed in his castle in the Bavarian Alps early in 1945. The Second World War ended a few months later."

As Harry was eating his fourth slice of pepperoni, Moody was visiting the headmaster. Moody asked, "So how do you expect Potter to kill Voldemort? To my knowledge, no one's beaten him in a proper duel,

he's a dirty fighter, and from what you told me last year, their wands won't even work properly against each other."

"I will get him another wand or perhaps a staff and train him to fight him when the time is ready."

Moody's eye swiveled around in disbelief. He questioned, "That's the plan that you've come up with? You're going to teach him dueling in your spare time?"

"Yes. We both have other obligations. I have my responsibilities with the Wizengamot and the school. Harry has his other classes to attend to. I believe I could help him two or three evenings a week."

Moody said little, and asked, "How long do you anticipate that he would need before he was ready?"

Dumbledore considered his question and replied, "A year. Perhaps two. It is a shame that he allowed himself to become so distracted these last few months."

Moody asked, "Can the castle withstand an attack when Voldemort comes for you? He may have had a setback with the loss of his top Death Eaters, but you can't believe that he'll sit still for eighteen months until you let him know that Potter's ready."

Dumbledore responded, "It's the best plan that we have."

Moody said nothing.

At nine AM on Monday, Dumbledore apparated to the back of 12 Grimmauld Place. As he was turning the knob to let himself in, he thought better, and gently knocked. Dobby the house elf immediately opened the door and greeted him. "Good morning Professor sir. You is expected. Please come in."

"Dumbledore smiled. "How are you, Dobby?"

“Dobby likes working for Harry Potter Professor Sir. Harry Potter and the others are good to Dobby and Winky.”

“Good. Will you be coming back to the castle next week when Harry and Miss Granger return for fall term?”

The little elf replied, “Harry Potter has not said anything to Dobby, Professor sir. Dobby will ask him later. They are waiting for you in the library.”

Dumbledore walked into the library a bit less sure of himself, but tried not to show it. Instead, he greeted them with eyes twinkling.

“Good morning, Professor,” said Hermione.

Harry looked at Dan who nodded slightly and began. “Professor, Hermione and I as well as our parents believe that we are in need of some training that we’re not likely to find in herbology or potions class. We are hoping that you have been giving serious consideration to a method that I can use to kill Voldemort and live to talk about it.”

Dumbledore replied, “Be assured that I have Harry. Regarding options what have you considered?”

Harry said, “I basically see two options – fight Riddle sooner or fight him later. If I wait a few years, we could move to the States or Australia and train up properly. If I fight him earlier then I’ll need full time training in military skills, dueling and some specialty spells. Either way, I want to be in a position to fight him on my own terms. What are your suggestions?”

“I would like to tutor you several evenings a week. I would recommend that you take potions, transfiguration, charms and healing. If you wish to play Quidditch, I will schedule our sessions around your practice sessions. I would also like to arrange Occlumency lessons for you as soon as school starts.”

Dan asked, “How do you see Voldemort being defeated, Professor?”

Dumbledore replied, "I anticipate that in eighteen to twenty four months Harry may have acquired the skills necessary to best Riddle in a duel."

Dan asked, "How many people will have died in the mean time?"

Dumbledore rubbed his forehead. This was a question that no one wanted to hear the answer to. He replied, "Hundreds. Perhaps thousands will have died before Harry is ready to duel with Riddle and have at least an even chance of surviving. Those are the unfortunate facts in this situation."

Hermione was so torn. Almost everything that she had worked for in the last five years was leading up to acing the NEWTs and being Head Girl. They were goals that still held real value for her, yet she didn't think that she could live with herself if she allowed Harry to delay acquiring the skills needed to kill that evil man.

She knew that Harry was in line to assume the position of Quidditch captain this year and Head Boy next year. In reality, their childhoods had been stripped away from them, and most likely, neither of them would ever have Head anything as honors. She realized their destiny would most likely place Order of Merlin awards next to their name, living or dead.

There really was nothing more to be said. Dumbledore had made his offer as had the others. Harry said, "Thank you Professor for coming out. I need to talk out our options with Hermione and our parents. Whatever we decide to do, I know that we can count on your help."

Dumbledore could never recall being dismissed by a student before, but there was a first time for everything. He said, "I will expect you both on the first of September unless I receive notice to the contrary. I wish you all the best." With that said, he got up walked out the door and apparated back to the station.

Harry went to the kitchen and asked Winky to bring a tray of butterbeers and tea. After he walked back into the study and closed

the door he asked Emma for her advice. She gave it, and ten minutes later Dan gave his. After they were done Emma said, "We need to make some calls to our Surgery. You two have a lot to discuss. We'll support any decision that you make. We'll catch up with you at lunchtime. It's a lovely day. Maybe you two should take a stroll in the park."

Taking their advice they walked out the door with Shepard following a dozen steps behind. Hermione asked, "Are you sure about this?"

Harry said, "I'm positive, but I'll follow your advice."

Hermione said, "Let's go tell Mum and Dad. We'll have to get our book lists and do some shopping. Remember, you promised Dad that you'd take him to Gringotts."

The first of September arrived. Arthur loaded the trunks into the boot of Dan's BMW. Shepard sat in the front seat as the four teens chatted amicably in the back. Molly had ridden with Dan and Emma in her car. They watched with interest as the six of them passed through the brick barrier of platform. They waved at friends until it was time to get on the Hogwarts Express. Parents and friends hugged with promises of owls.

Harry saw Professor Dumbledore approach. There had been quite a bit of extra security this time, but fortunately there had been no incidents. He asked, "Are you certain that you won't reconsider?"

Harry and Hermione shook their heads and replied, "No thanks."

Dumbledore really didn't expect that they would change their minds. Instead he said, "There will always be a place for both of you at Hogwarts. Good luck. "They shook hands and parted as friends, knowing that they had a common enemy and similar goals even if the methods that they had selected were different.

A/N

Serious action in the next chapter. Be prepared.

You have been given all of the clues. How does it end?

Abraxan's The Refiner's Fire and the follow on story are fantastic.

Chapter 20

After seeing their friends off at the train station, Hermione and Harry accompanied Auror Church to the Ministry of Magic. After a few minutes, they were shown into Bones' office. Her office wasn't cluttered as he might have expected. There was a single photo of herself and Susan taken together on a boat hanging in the wall behind where Harry and Hermione were seated. Harry smiled. It was a nice photo.

Bones began, "I have made the following arrangements, subject to your approval. On Monday through Friday, you will be training at the Basingbourn military base. You both will learn basic marksmanship, concealment, spotting, and advanced rifle skills. You will be there as government service visitors on an interdepartmental exchange program. Here are your temporary government service identification papers and badges. The birthdates have been altered. At the completion of the first part of the training, you will be issued permits to purchase the weapons of your choosing. I trust that neither of you will misuse them in any way. Auror Shepherd will accompany you and take part in the training with you. You will be there from 9:00 until 3:00 PM. Evenings you will be learning Auror level dueling and fighting techniques from Tom Campbell one of the regular Auror Instructors. Saturday and Sunday from 9:00 to 3:00 PM you will receive tutoring in transfiguration and charms respectively. Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings will be your own time."

She continued. "This Wednesday through Friday, you will be receiving instruction on basic apparation. I am hoping that you can pass your test and receive your license on Saturday. What questions can I answer?"

Hermione, who knew geography a bit better than Harry asked, "Where will we be living?" Basingbourn was too far from Grimmauld place to drive.

Bones answered, "You can remain at your home at Grimmauld Place. I have made arrangements to have you registered as guests at the Old Bull Inn in Basingbourn. You can apparate there with Shepherd and drive to the training site. At the end of the day, you can drive

back to the hotel and apparate back. There will be the extra expense of the rooms, but I don't think it would be prohibitive." She winked at Harry, knowing that he could afford to buy the hotel if he wished to.

Harry asked, "Who will our contact be at the military base at Basingbourn?"

Bones replied, "You will report to the main entrance and ask to see colonel McMasters. He believes that Department M1031 is simply another branch of the British secret service. Stick to your cover stories that are referenced in your envelopes."

Hermione asked, "What books will we need to read?"

Bones smiled, knowing that the question had been on Hermione's mind from the start. She handed them each a small bag containing shrunken books, uniforms, and boots, which they would need.

Harry asked, "Who knows what we are working on?"

Bone smiled again, anticipating that the question might have been on Harry's mind. She replied, "Aside from us, Hammer, Shepherd, McGonagall, and Flitwick are aware of all or part of your activities. Anticipating your other question, Dumbledore, McGonagall and Flitwick haven't been told about the training at Basingbourn. Your school professors have been compensated well, and have agreed not to discuss their tutoring work with anyone. They will co-operate with you fully. Church will be spending weekday evenings at your home. Would you allow Auror Tonks to spend weekends there? If not, I will find a suitable substitute. Before you answer, I should point out that Auror Tonks and Auror Jones both voluntarily resigned from Dumbledore's militia last week."

Hermione was surprised at the news. She glanced at Harry, nodded then said, "That would be fine with us. How else can we help you?"

Bone replied, "Train hard, stay safe, and share your memories with me when you blow up that bastard."

The meeting was over. They shook hands and parted company. Church accompanied them to Gringotts where Harry withdrew 80,000 in Sterling. They took a portkey back to Grimmauld place and were home by 4:00 PM.

At dinner that night, Emma asked, "How was your day, dears?"

Hermione said, "It was strange to see all of our friends off as they got onto the train. I think they all assumed that we were just getting on a bit later. They probably won't be told that we're not there until the opening announcements at Hogwarts this evening."

Molly and Arthur didn't say anything, knowing that there was more to the story.

Harry continued, "We met with Minister Bones for about three hours and agreed on our schedules for the next two months."

Molly asked, "Three hours? That seems like a long period of time to discuss class."

Arthur said, "Molly dear, it's not our place to ask. I'm certain that almost everything that they discussed is highly confidential information."

Harry nodded. "Mostly what we're going to be doing for the next few months is training in techniques that we can use to destroy Voldemort with as little risk to ourselves as we can."

Hermione added, "The ministry will leak that we have traveled to the States to go with our parents. We need your help to stick with that story. If you write or converse with anyone, you'll need to stick to that story. It will make our travel to where we'll be training a lot safer."

Dan and Emma had so far been silent. Dan asked, "In whatever level of detail that you are comfortable using, can you tell us what you'll be doing?"

Harry said, "We'll be learning military training at one of the military bases in England. Our training there will be Monday through Friday from 9:00 to 3:00. We'll travel there and back each day. After dinner, we'll be receiving specialized Auror training upstairs for three hours. We have Friday, through Sunday evenings off. Saturday all day we have tutoring with professor McGonagall. Sunday all day we have training with professor Flitwick."

"That seems like quite a bit," said Molly.

Hermione replied, "We'll get through our sixth year studies in those two classes by mid October. We also have some specialized charms that we need to work on." Molly was certain that she didn't want to know about those magics.

Harry added, "We are taking apparition training for the next few days and testing this weekend. That will make it a lot easier to get to the places that we need to get to."

Hermione said, "Mum, Dad, if you wouldn't terribly mind, we'd love to have you stay here with us, as long as you'd be willing to. You wouldn't get to go out of the house too much, but we could have dinner each evening, and we'd feel better knowing that you were safe."

Harry said, "We'd understand if you'd rather go visit the States for a while, but Hermione's right. We'd love to be able to spend time with you."

Dan said, "We can still get in half a round at the short course three miles away on Saturday evenings."

Harry nodded and said, "We could play skins for a pint a skin."

Dan said, "Emma, if it's all right with you, I'd like to stay, at least through October."

The two Granger women looked at each other and shook their heads. Then they started laughing. Hermione said, "Honestly, you two are so

predictable. Why don't you build a putting green upstairs while you're at it?"

Dan and Harry looked at each other like it was a great idea. Emma muttered, "Boys and their toys."

There was a buzz of noise that began after the students got off of the train at 6:00 PM that evening. Broken only by Hagrid's call of "First years. First years over here," it grew as the students piled into the Great Hall. The older students looked around in wonder. Where was Snape? Where was Malfoy? Where were Potter and Granger?

The names of the Death Eaters killed during the raid on the Grangers had never made the newspapers. Some of the students knew, but the vast majority hadn't heard a thing. After the sorting of the first years, Dumbledore rose to greet the students. "Good evening. Welcome to another year at Hogwarts. New students, welcome. Older students, welcome back. I have many announcements this evening that are worth mentioning. Many of them in some way concern one of our older students, Harry Potter. Mr. Potter's guardians fell victim to an attack from Voldemort's Death Eaters last July. Per Mr. Potter's wishes, Miss Granger's parents became Harry's legal guardians, and welcomed him into their home. During the summer, Death Eaters also attacked the Granger's home. Fortunately, Mr. Potter and Miss Granger were able to capably defend themselves, and two Death Eaters were killed."

The hall was absolutely silent as Dumbledore continued. "The men killed were Severus Snape and Draco Malfoy."

The hall erupted in chatter. There was sporadic clapping, which ended almost immediately under withering looks from the three heads of houses.

Dumbledore continued. "There were several other attacks from Death Eaters during the holidays. Miss Abbot lost her parents, The Creevey brothers lost their mother, and the Weasley home was destroyed."

There was virtual silence. Almost everyone in the school liked Hannah, Dennis and Colin.

Dumbledore continued. "I was made aware that I had failed many of you in the last year. I am truly sorry. I failed to protect you from two professors that had overstepped the boundaries of their authority, and in several cases, the law. Severus Snape consistently elected not to treat all of the students in the nurturing manor that you deserve. More than a few of you were badly mistreated by Delores Umbridge last year. She is currently reconsidering her actions of the past year while residing in Azkaban prison."

There was quite a bit of clapping and cheering, some from the other professors. Only Filch could be seen scowling at the news. Dumbledore continued. "I would say this – If any student is intimidated or mistreated by anyone in the castle, be it student or staff, I ask that you come to me immediately. Such behavior will not be tolerated. Again, I apologize and will strive to serve you better."

He continued, "Many of you may know that there was a battle at the Ministry of Magic last June. Eleven Death Eaters were captured. Unfortunately Voldemort and Bellatrix Lestrange escaped. The eleven Death Eaters captured were tried, and either executed or sent to Azkaban for life sentences."

There was quite a bit of cheering and applause. It had become common knowledge among Ravenclaw and Gryffindor house that some of their own had been involved in their capture. Lovegood and Longbottom would never again be the butt of any jokes within their houses.

After a moment, the noise had died down, and it was obvious that Dumbledore had a bit more to say. "Mr. Potter and Miss Granger have requested, and been granted a leave of absence to help relocate the Grangers to the States." It was a passable excuse, and something had needed to be said.

Dumbledore introduced Shacklebolt as DADA professor and head of Slytherin and Kim Lee professor of potions. After the feast, and final announcements regarding forbidden items and the forbidden forest,

Dumbledore wished them all a good year, and dismissed them to their common rooms.

Next to flying, Apparition turned out to be the hardest thing that Hermione had done and the easiest thing that Harry had done. Like flying, it wasn't one of those things that lent itself to learning out of a book. It was the sheer level of mental focus needed to project yourself being in another location that made it different from other spell casting.

Harry picked it up within minutes. He never let himself get distracted from what he was doing, and almost silently he was gone, then had instantly reappeared where he had projected himself to be. It was simple.

Meanwhile his bushy haired love kept considering the different aspects of the theory, the possible effects of splinching, and the actual travel. After half an hour, all she had managed to work up was a red face and a sweat.

Harry walked up to her and softly said, "Remember last year when you were learning to cast your Patronus form?" She nodded. Harry replied, "I think apparation is the same way – Focus really hard, and just do it. See yourself on the other side of the room, and just be there."

POP!

"That's brilliant. I knew that you could do it." He gave her a hug and quite the kiss. Shepherd smiled at the two as they nuzzled each other.

They continued to practice and easily passed their licensing exams over the weekend.

Neither Harry nor Hermione had any preconceived notions about snipers or their craft. Some would compare them to cold-blooded

murders, while others would say that they were daring soldiers doing an ugly job that helped save lives.

Sgt James Lancaster was not a big man in terms of stature. He was soft spoken and quite friendly when he greeted Harry. What set him apart was his incredible ability to focus completely on what he was doing. He explained, "The job itself really has several distinct parts. First you have to get to a location where your target is likely to be visible to you. Then you have to set up a location where you can hide and not be seen. Then you have to wait until you see your target. Then you have to hit your target. Finally you have to get away safely. Your mission may take hours or many days, depending on the circumstances. The key is to stay completely focused."

Harry, Hermione, and Shepherd nodded in understanding. Lancaster looked at the three with some doubt. Harry looked even younger than he really was because of his size, but had a steely glint in his eyes. Lancaster had no experience to speak of with training women, and Shepherd looked more like a soft duty policeman than infantry. He asked, "Have any of you ever see any action before?" It was a reasonable question, and wasn't strictly meant to be insulting.

"We have," replied Harry, who Lancaster immediately decided was in charge of the trio, regardless of any actual rank or age differences.

"Did you have to take lives?" asked Lancaster with considerably more respect.

Harry nodded.

He looked them in the eye and replied, "Then your action helped save lives."

Hermione replied, "It did."

Lancaster nodded in agreement. "If I may ask, how many firefights have you been in?"

Harry replied, "If you're asking how many times we've had to draw our weapon and fire at an enemy who was trying to kill someone, four times in my case." There was no hint of bragging in his voice.

"Twice," said Hermione, softly. She wasn't bragging either, or asking for pity, just stating a fact.

"Not yet," replied Shepherd.

Lancaster had heard people puff up their service records for years, and could spot a liar in an instant. He had not seen the service records on these three, but instinctively knew them to be telling the truth. Since they didn't appear to be military, he asked, "Have any of you fired a rifle before?"

Harry glanced at Shepherd for an instant and replied, "None of us have, Sergeant."

Normally Lancaster would have left them at that moment, but he had been given orders, and they had come through very unusual channels. He asked, "As specifically as you can, explain your mission."

Harry began, "We are assigned to track down and kill a highly dangerous terrorist who is living in Britain. He has several dozen followers who are all killers. I have some reason to believe that he is going to attack a small village in northern Scotland in two months time. The best estimate that we currently have is the afternoon of Saturday 26 October. There are some foothills immediately to the north of the village, and there is a small cave that we could use as a hiding position. It's about 800 yards from one possible position and 900 from the other. We can get there without being seen, and can leave very quickly if we need to."

Hermione added, "It's absolutely critical that the target be killed instantly. It would be disastrous if he were wounded. There may be other targets, possibly up to twenty-five. There will likely be civilians, most likely school children in the area. The terrorists won't hesitate an instant to kill any of them."

Lancaster considered their words for a moment and replied, "800 yards is a long shot. 900 yards will seem like forever. The L96 has an effective range of 1,000 yards, but might not have enough punch to put your target down if he's wearing any armor".

"How about a .50 calibre BMG?" asked Hermione. "The slug is four times the weight of the 308 and has seven times the energy at 1,000 yards."

Lancaster was impressed at the young woman, and replied, "It would be a good choice for the situation that you described. Unfortunately, we don't have one here."

"I'll get four," replied Harry. "Our department has a pretty large budget."

"I suggest the M-82A1," replied Lancaster. "It has a ten round magazine."

"What size scope?" asked Hermione, thankful that she had done enough reading to be able to ask reasonable questions.

"42 power," replied Lancaster. "We have those here. Get the rifles, 800 rounds of match grade ammunition and the scope mounting rings. I'll get the rest. When can you have them?"

"Two or three days," replied Shepherd, as Hermione was carefully writing the specifications that Lancaster had mentioned.

"Do you need the money now?" asked Harry to Shepherd.

Shepherd nodded yes, and replied, "I have the approved purchase permits already filled out."

"They would be about 10,000 sterling each and another 4,000 for the ammunition," said Lancaster.

Harry nodded and asked Shepherd to pick up the funds that evening.

Lancaster asked his original question differently, "Would it be possible to be safely hidden and be a bit closer to the target? It would make your job easier.

Hermione asked, "Would the noise be heard from 800 yards?

Lancaster replied, "Yes, but the sound might not be recognizable to someone that wasn't familiar with rifles. "Will there be a lot of noise in the village?"

Harry replied, "Loads. Unfortunately most of will be from innocent people screaming for their lives."

Lancaster nodded, and asked, "Will your targets be standing or running?"

Harry thought back to the night in the graveyard and the evening in the Department of Mysteries. He replied, "Standing still. We really can't get any closer and safely remain hidden."

He said, "You might do best with one shooter and two spotters."

For the rest of the day, Lancaster covered the basics of shooting a rifle, the concepts of drop, velocity, distance, the wind and how to best use the range finders. He demonstrated various shooting positions.

Harry replied, "I will investigate the cave more over the weekend and see how much room there is and get some exact distances. We'll also look at sightlines."

Lancaster replied, "Very good. Be back here tomorrow at 0900. Dismissed."

While Harry and company was learning the basics of marksmanship, Amelia was meeting with the PM discussing the threat that Riddle

represented to the British population, and recommended launching simultaneous air strikes against four specific properties. She met with much resistance and finally received approval due to the isolated location of the four properties, after exhausting the alternatives. She was given an authorization document and a contact within the SAS to make the arrangements with.

The Riddle house in Little Hangleton was not in one of the highly populated areas of West Sussex County. Malfoy Manor located some twenty miles to the west wasn't either. Mulciber and Dolohov had both live north of Leeds about fifteen miles apart. Like the Malfoys, they were out of the city in country estates. Bones carefully considered this information before making her decision. She would meet with the SAS colonel and advise him of her mission.

After dinner, Harry and Hermione went up to the third floor. They met Amelia and the Auror Instructor Tom Campbell. He reminded Harry a lot of Lancaster. Both men were small of stature, and giants in the courage department. Amelia made the introductions and left a few minutes later. She had told them that from her viewpoint, they each had top security clearance.

After Amelia left, Campbell reintroduced himself. "I'm Tom Campbell. My students always call me Instructor Campbell. None of my other students have captured or killed Death Eaters before. In all honesty, either have I, but I have faced my share of bad wizards and witches. Please call me Tom, Mr. Potter."

Harry smiled, and replied, "Only if you call me Harry."

Tom, said, "Sir, you've earned..."

Harry shook his head, and said, "Tom, so have you. Let's just go on a first name basis. OK?"

Campbell replied, "Very good, Harry, Hermione." He looked around the large open room and said, "First with your permission, I would like

to cast some charms to expand the area and seal the walls, floor and ceiling to prevent spell damage. Please give me an hour.”

Hermione asked, “Would it be OK if we just watched?”

Campbell replied, “Of course.” He proceeded to expand the room until it was about the size of a football field with a 30 feet ceiling. Next he cast impervious charms on each section of the walls, ceiling and floor. Finally he carefully etched some runes on the different corners.

When he was done, Hermione asked, “I understood how you expanded the dimensions of the room and I understand how you cast the charms on the walls, ceiling and floor to resist damage. What were the runes for?”

“Very good Hermione,” replied Campbell. Minister Bones told me that you wouldn’t miss a thing. The will mask the spell signatures to mask the actual spells that are performed in this room.”

Hermione nodded, smiling at the compliment.

Campbell conjured three stools for them to sit at and motioned them to sit. Getting to the point, he asked, “Minister Bones asked me to cooperate completely with the two of you, and I intend to. What would you like to learn?”

Hermione looked at Harry, who shook his head. Harry replied, “In short, it had been prophesized that I will be the one to kill or be killed by Voldemort. I believe that it will happen yet this year.”

Campbell remained silent, but thought, ‘Mr. Potter, it sucks to be you;.

Harry smiled, guessing Campbell’s thoughts. He continued, “In no particular order, we need to learn, Occlumency, Legilimency, spell accuracy, adding power to our spells, advanced shields, and if possible wandless magics.”

Campbell replied, “I’m glad that I asked. Given what you said, the regular law enforcement class pretty much goes out the window.

Arrest and investigative techniques really don't make much sense in your case."

They sat in comfortable silence for a few minutes, then Campbell asked, "You're really not as concerned with disabling or stunning the Death Eaters as putting them down. Is that a fair statement?"

Harry replied, "Tom when we were fighting for our lives in the Department of Mysteries, between the six of us, we took down each of the Death Eaters except Voldemort at least once. In almost every case, they revived each other, and continued coming after us, and a good man got killed. So to answer your question as honestly as I can, the next time that I put one of them down, I don't expect them to get back up."

Campbell and the teens discussed the lesson plan that they would use for the next month and called it an evening. They had a very full schedule.

The rifles that Shepherd had bought were huge! With the magazine full they weighed nearly 35 pounds, and were nearly 5 feet in length! They had a carrying handle near the center. Then again the metal boxes of ammunition weren't exactly light either. Each bullet that Lancaster examined one by one was the size of a Churchill cigar. Harry had no idea what he was looking for as Lancaster set the seemingly identical bullets into different piles.

Lancaster handed Harry a thin drinking straw and said, "Hold this." Then he proceeded to ask Hermione to help carry over a table with little molded plastic soldiers, a few toy buildings and a toy tree. He said, "Hermione, arrange the soldiers buildings and trees any way that you want."

To no one's surprise, she set them up in a neat order. Lancaster said, "Harry come up and take a quick look at what she set up." Harry did, noting the red house and the green house that she had set up.

Lancaster said, "Now Harry take about 5 steps back and look through the little straw." Harry's side to side field of vision shrank to almost nothing. Instead of being able to see the entire table that Hermione had set up, he could see a tiny spec. It was like looking at a page of paper and only being able to see one letter at a time.

Lancaster continued. "Hermione, I want you to identify one of the soldiers in your mind. Pick one out and tell me when you are ready."

She selected one and replied, "OK."

"Now, I want you to describe where he is for Harry. Harry tell her what you see and she'll direct you to look left, right closer or farther back." They started.

Hermione said, "Harry tell me when you have found the red house."

Harry looked and a few seconds later, said "Got it."

She said, "Look to the left and farther back. There are two guys."

Harry carefully looked back diagonally from the red house and a few seconds later said, "Got em."

Hermione said, "He's the guy on the right."

"Got it."

Lancaster said, "Good. You two seem to work well together."

They tried it again with Shepherd directing Harry, and eventually took turns with each person directing another. They all concluded that it was harder than it looked.

Lancaster looked at them and said, "You three seem to work well together. The spotter's job is to point the shooter. You can't see very far from side to side with the 42 power scope, but you'll need the magnification at that distance to pick out the detail. The spotter will be using 15 power binoculars. That should be enough to be able to pick out an individual face at your distance. The second spotter will also

have a set of binoculars, but mostly they will be looking not at the target area, but all around you to make certain that you haven't been compromised. In your situation the good news is you'll be in a cave, the bad news is you'll be in a cave. He handed Shepherd a good quality camera and said, "Take some pictures of the area and the place where you think you'll be hiding. We'll look at them next week. Dismissed."

A few weeks later on Saturday morning, Harry and Hermione were surprised to see Amelia Bones and Director Hammer being led into the training room rather than McGonagall. Harry greeted them saying, "Good morning, Minister, Director, can I get you a coffee or tea?" Winky immediately appeared carrying a tray of each along with several bottles of butterbeer. Bones conjured a table and six chairs and they sat down. Shepherd joined them a moment later.

Amelia asked, "Harry, what do you know about airplane bombs?"

Harry had read about the bombings of London and other cities in Britain during World War Two. He replied, "They're not too accurate, but you don't want to be on the receiving end of one."

Hermione smiled at his simplistic, yet accurate answer.

Bones said, "Right. The problem with bombs is getting them to fall on the object that you want to hit. The advantage of them is that the people delivering them are already safely away by the time that they fall. Consider this - the jet that drops the bomb is moving at a high speed, say six hundred miles per hour. From altitude, the bomb will fall for about two minutes. So the jet has to drop the bomb before it gets to the target so it can fall down due to gravity and forward due to the momentum and airspeed that it started with."

Harry nodded, more or less understanding. To no one's surprise, Hermione grasped the concept immediately. Shepherd and Hammer did about as well as Harry.

Bones continued, "The military has developed methods of steering the bomb slightly as it falls by means of adjustable fins."

Hermione who couldn't contain herself another moment asked, "How does it get guided to its target?"

Bones smiled, knowing that she had the concept perfectly. "By pointing a laser light at the target that the guidance system uses as a bull's-eye, the bomb knows where to go."

Shepherd asked, "How does the laser light get pointed at the target."

Bones took a large object out of the bag that she was carrying. It looked quite a bit like the spotting scopes that they had been using with Lancaster. She set one up and pointed it to the wall and turned it on. A brilliant red light the size of a small coin shined on the wall. It was uncomfortable to look at for any length of time. She shut it off.

Hermione asked, "What are the targets, Minister?"

"The homes of four known Death Eaters that we believe are harboring Death Eaters, illegal items, and possibly Voldemort himself."

No one said anything, so she continued, "Riddle manor is in Hangleton in Sussex County. Malfoy manor is about twenty miles to the west. Dolohov, and Mulciber's manors are near each other about twenty miles north of Leeds. The plan is to have you operate in teams of two. You will need to be within 500 yards of the target. Harry, you will need to be on the west side of both targets so the bomb will be able to see the laser painted on the side of the house. Connie, you will need to be on the south side of both of your targets. After the first bomb hits, you'll have two minutes to apparate to the second location and shine the laser on that target. You cannot be late getting to the second target. Hermione, you'll go with Hammer, Harry you'll go with Shepherd. Riddle and Mulciber manor are first then Malfoy and Dolohov manors. The first bombs will be released at 7:00 and should hit at 7:02. The second bombs will be released by 7:04.

No one said anything, so Bones continued. "The four backup raiding parties will be on site at 7:05 and 7:10 respectively. They will do a damage assessment, recover any gold, and banish any dangerous items that they find. They will be at each site ten minutes then leave, with instructions not to get into firefights. You need to be gone before they get there. Do not let them see you. They will not be told how the homes exploded, only that they did. Hammer and Shepherd will banish the laser scopes and radios before they leave the second sites. They must not be found. What questions do you have?"

Shepherd asked, "How will we get there?"

Bones replied, "You and Hammer will go this afternoon and select the sites. Hammer will make portkeys. Harry, I trust that I can leave this equipment here for a few days?"

"Of course Minister."

"We will do a short radio check. The Harrier call signs are Mug one and Mug two. The call sign for the Riddle crew is Flashlight one. That's you Harry. Flashlight two is Shepherd for the Malfoy crew. Flashlight three is Hermione for the Mulciber crew and Flashlight four is Hammer for the Dolohov crew. Obviously the air crew does not know that we're witches and wizards and really the same crews are going to both places."

She demonstrated how to turn on the radios and press the button to talk. She said, "In five minutes, we will do a radio check. You'll press the talk button and identify yourself then let up on the button. The SAS radio operator will acknowledge you by your call sign. Then Flashlight two will go, then three, finally Hammer. Ready?"

Everyone nodded. They switched their radio on and adjusted their headsets.

Harry began. He pushed the button and said, "Flashlight one."

A few seconds later he heard the radio operator reply, "Flashlight one, clear." Bones nodded at Shepherd.

Shepherd said, "Flashlight two."

"Flashlight two, clear."

Hermione said, "Flashlight three."

"Flashlight three, clear."

Hammer said, "Flashlight four."

"Flashlight four, clear."

Bones said, after you have aimed the laser to the side or the roof of the house and the Harrier has acknowledged seeing it, do not move it, but be flat on the ground. Transfigure some cover if you need to so you don't get injured, and wear your hearing protection. If the bomb hits the home, you will confirm the hit by saying Flashlight one confirmed. If the bomb missed you would say Flashlight one denied. Don't say anything else."

Everyone nodded. Hermione took notes and put them in her book. All of the equipment worked well, and the radios were switched off.

Bones concluded saying, "You don't want to be seen, and it's extremely unlikely that you would be. If you are, you are authorized to stun any muggle that you encounter. Anyone near the homes is considered an unfriendly." Bones specifically looked at Harry and said, "There will be no heroics here. If a busload of school children were to drive up to the door one minute before the bomb was to be dropped, it would be their bad luck. Do not call off the strikes. Do not get into any sort of firefight and expose yourself. It is critical that they all happen as planned. Can you each do this?"

Everyone nodded, yes.

Bones decided to give them her rationalization. "Harry, I told you that I would do everything that I could to end the war this year. Voldemort has two major weapons that he's using against us – people and financial resources. Since the goblins began helping us, there have been some very large withdrawals made from several accounts that

we believe were fronting money that Voldemort has been using to wage war on us. We believe that the funds are being held in one or more of these locations as well as fugitive Death Eaters. We believe that Malfoy manor is being used to hold meetings and serve as a staging point for raids.”

Hammer, said, “You don’t need to rationalize your decision, Minister. We all support it.” The others nodded in agreement.

Bones thanked them and said, “Mr. Potter, professor McGonagall is patiently waiting for the two of you in your library. Hammer and I will see our own way out. No one is to know of these raids prior to their happening.”

Harry and Hermione nodded and they left to greet McGonagall.

Bones had previously informed McGonagall and Flitwick that they were to offer the standard sixth and seventh year curriculums to Potter and Granger each week and not to assign them much in the way of homework. She specifically told them that in the event that the students asked them to deviate from the normal lessons with a special request, they were to do everything that they could to honor those requests, and not discuss them with anyone else. For their services they were each being paid an additional twenty five thousand Galleons from Ministry funds. In reality, each of them would have gladly volunteered their time.

As such, Minerva was not surprised when Hermione asked if they could review how to transfigure a pebble into a solid stone wall that they could hide behind. She asked what they needed and in general terms were told of its use. Two hours later, they had transfigured and banished several dozen barriers and were satisfied that they could create them as quickly as they would need.

Minerva didn’t feel her time had been wasted when Hermione and Harry asked how Ron and some of the other students were. She realized that under different circumstances, both the witch and wizard that she was talking with would rather be in the Great Hall with their

classmates at this moment. After an hour of small talk and catching them up on the events of school, she got up to leave. She hugged them both when she left and wished them both a good week. She wasn't surprised, and didn't ask questions when Harry told her that they wouldn't be available for lessons the next weekend.

The next day, Hermione worked with Flitwick. He had not been surprised when she had asked for information on soul binding charms the previous week. Her request had been a bit more specific. She needed to cast the soul binding charm to Riddle within five seconds of his death to ensure that he didn't wander off in spirit form like had happened fifteen years before.

Like McGonagall, the little wizard wasn't surprised at her request. In fact, he had been researching it for over a year, realizing its eventual need. The only surprise was that the request had come from the Granger girl, not Dumbledore or Potter.

The teens had not made arrangements to cancel class next Sunday, but per Bones' instructions, Flitwick and McGonagall would not discuss the change of schedule with anyone. The only difference would be that Minerva would be able to enjoy the outing to Hogsmede the following Saturday. Neither of them had been told that about the teens' plans for the day.

Wednesday at 0500, SAS Harrier pilots Stevens and Lee met in the briefing room and received their orders. They were going to bomb four estate homes, dropping one 1,000 pound Paveway III laser guided bomb from an altitude of 20,000 feet on each target. In total, they would be in the air about an hour each. Their call signs would be mug one and mug two respectively. They were told that the estates housed international terrorists considered too dangerous to take out with land-based troops.

At 6:30 the two pilots took off and went their separate ways. At 6:45 they received the confirmation call. "Flashlight six. Mission confirmed."

As the call was being confirmed, Shepherd and Harry had finished adjusting the tripod holding the laser light and switched it on. The red beam shined against the roof of the Riddle house looking like an oversized laser pointer. If you weren't looking for the beam, you would never notice it. Harry clicked on the radio and said, "Flashlight one. Target painted."

Moments later he heard, "Mug one, received."

Moments later Hammer and Hermione finished adjusting their laser light and switched it on. Hermione clicked on her radio and said, "Flashlight two. Target painted."

Two seconds later, she heard, "Mug two, received."

At 7:00 two of the fourteen foot bombs were released. The fins immediately extended and soundlessly they glided to their targets.

On the ground, the witches and wizards waited, covered behind the transfigured barriers, flat on the ground wearing their hearing protection. For two minutes, they waited.

Boom!

Harry and Shepherd could feel the shockwave from their barrier 400 yards from the target site. They got up to look. The Riddle house was no longer there! Harry clicked on the radio and said, "Flashlight one, confirmed," while Shepherd packed up the laser light. Harry transformed the barrier that he had made back into a pebble and put it back into his pocket.

A moment later they heard "Flashlight two confirmed." Both teams used their portkeys to take them to the second site. Harry immediately transfigured the barrier while Shepherd set up the laser light and they repeated the steps. Shepherd clicked the radio and

said, "Flashlight three. Target painted." Immediately they heard the same from Hammer.

Three minutes later, Harry and Shepherd were showered with falling galleons. The force of the blast had sent millions of the coins flying in every direction. They acknowledged the hit and left to go back to Grimmauld place. Hammer and Granger did the same. Hammer banished the lasers and radios and left moments later to return to her office.

Tonks was amazed when she waved her wand and said, "Accio Galleons." Suddenly a swarm of the gold coins came flying at her and landed in the magically expanded trunk that she had been told to bring. She had no idea what had caused the explosion at Malfoy manor and knew better than to ask. Ten minutes later, she and the other Aurors magically lightened the impossibly heavy trunks and used a portkey to bring them back to the Ministry.

The other teams found little evidence of physical destruction of magical objects. In fact dark books had been destroyed, as well as hundreds of illegal wands, and potions. At the site of the former Mulciber site, sixteen bodies of Death Eater recruits were found. Surprisingly at the site of the former Mulciber manor, over forty cloaks believed to have been dementors were found. They were brought back to the Ministry. The bodies were sent to the Ministry morgue to be identified.

There was no evidence that Riddle or Bellatrix had been in any of the homes when they had been destroyed. In fact at that moment, they were murdering Mrs. Figg and casting the Dark Mark.

Thirty minutes later, Voldemort and Bellatrix apparated back to what had been their home an hour ago and found a smoldering ruin. After looking around for a moment, they apparated to Malfoy manor and found the same thing. Within an hour they realized that most of their remaining assets had been destroyed. "They will pay," he said.

At that moment, Harry who was sitting in the kitchen having a butterbeer with Dan, Emma, Molly, Hermione and Shepherd felt an excruciating pain in his scar and fell onto the floor, rolling in agony.

Hermione who had been expecting such a reaction gave Harry a dreamless sleep potion and floated him up to his room. She put him to bed and crawled behind him to hold her best friend and the love of her life. For the rest of the day and night, she gently rocked him and brushed his hair until he woke up late the following morning.

The next morning, Hermione sat at the table and suddenly a panicked look crept on her face. She cried, "Harry!"

He put down the pancake that Winky had made and asked, "What's wrong?"

"We need someone else."

"Huh?"

Hermione explained "If I'm casting the soul binding charm on Riddle, and Shepherd is spotting you, we need another person for a lookout. I can't be in two places at once."

Harry thought about her words for a moment and asked, "How about Lancaster?"

Hermione shook her head and said, "We can't get him involved, remember? How about Tonks? She'd help us."

Harry declined, "I'd rather not." He still wasn't certain that she could keep a secret.

"What about Dad?"

Harry didn't want to get Dan involved or hurt. He replied, "He couldn't get away if we were seen. What about Remus?"

Hermione had similar doubts about him as Harry had with Tonks, and asked, "Would he keep a secret?"

Harry was certain that if specifically asked to, Remus would carry their secret to his grave. He replied, "I'm sure that he would. I'll get him."

Hermione agreed and said, "I'll do it." She kissed her boyfriend on the nose and went to use the fireplace.

Five minutes later, Remus walked into the library and closed the doors behind him. For fifteen minutes Harry and Hermione explained what they had been doing for the last six weeks as Remus listened carefully. He never interrupted them; rather he waited patiently until they were finished.

Remus had heard from Dumbledore at an emergency Order meeting on Wednesday evening that the four homes had mysteriously blown up earlier in the day. Half deeply impressed, half shocked he asked, "So the four of you called in air strikes and blew up those four houses?"

Harry and Hermione nodded. They hadn't mentioned Shepherd or Hammer by name, but it was obvious that Bones had organized the missions.

Remus smiled, shook his head in amazement and said, "Brilliant."

Harry said, "Unfortunately, you can never tell anyone. No one."

Remus bowed his head slightly and said, "I understand. I'll never say a word."

Harry said, "Here is a spare pair of the watcher's binoculars with a built in rangefinder. "I'd like you to go to the cave tomorrow and practice using them. We need an extra spotter, but we also need a watcher, so we don't get ambushed ourselves."

Remus nodded. Harry asked, "Can you come over Friday evening? We'll have dinner and get a chance to catch up properly. Bring spare clothing. We'll leave from here early Saturday morning. Unfortunately we have a lot of equipment to bring, and most of it's heavy."

Remus asked, "Can't you charm it?"

Harry replied, "We don't want to do anything that might throw off the optics even the least. We won't have the opportunity to re-sight the rifles once we get there."

After Remus left, Shepherd went up to Harry and asked, "Are you sure about that guy?"

Harry said, "I'd trust him with my life."

Shepherd replied, "That's the point Harry, you will be. Is he reliable? I could get one of the other Aurors."

Harry shook his head, and said, "If we're right, they'll all have their hands full. We don't know if he'll bring five Death Eaters with him or fifty Death Eaters and a herd of dementors. Remus will call Hammer the moment we see them. He was the best defense instructor that I ever had, and he has incredible eyesight and hearing. We'll go with him."

Friday, they went back to the military base at Bassingbourn one last time and thanked Lancaster. True to his word, Harry gave him one of the magnificent rifles and a box of the match cartridges."

Lancaster asked, "I won't see you again or read about this little operation in the newspapers, will I?"

Harry shook his head, and said, "I doubt it, but if we meet again, I'll buy you a beer and we can talk about golf."

Lancaster gave a laugh and said, "I know about golf. Let's talk about beaches and birds instead over a dozen beers. Good luck, Mr. Potter. Dismissed."

Remus arrived early Friday afternoon. They checked their equipment and set them in four individual piles. Harry had cancelled his lesson with Campbell. Dan had grilled steaks and they had a very pleasant evening together. By 9:00 everyone had gone to bed.

Hermione made love with Harry for the first time that night. The exact rationalization for the timing went unstated, but they both felt that it was the right thing to do. Brief, but magical, they both promised each other that they would do everything that they could to keep each other safe the next day, and to take a lot more time with each other in the days and nights to come.

Hermione knew that she was taking an incredible risk intentionally placing herself just feet away from Voldemort. She told herself that if Harry could face him all of those times, she could do it once.

Harry, Hermione, Shepherd, and Remus apparated to Hogsmede station at 4:30 AM. As inconspicuously as they could, they made their way to the cave and set up the two rifles, spotting scope, shooting mats, water and sandwiches. The students would arrive at ten and have to leave by four. None of them knew for certain if the village would be attacked that day, but each believed that it would happen.

The Three Broomsticks pub was about 900 yards from the entrance to the cave. Remus banished several trees that had blocked Harry's view. Using the range finder, Harry took distance readings from that he considered the two most likely places for the Death Eaters to attack – The Hogs Head and the Three Broomsticks.

As the sun grew higher in the sky, they sat in the little cave and waited. By 7:00 AM, Harry had re-ranged the different locations

several times. The only part of the plan that he didn't like was Hermione's involvement in the village. She would be there to cast the soul binding charm the moment that Riddle was hit. Unfortunately to do so, she had to be near him which would put her out in the open."

Based on the tests that he had performed with Lancaster, Harry was fairly certain that the sound from the rifle wouldn't carry all the way to the village. As such, he might get a second shot if he needed it.

At two PM Voldemort, Pettigrew and two dozen Death Eaters apparated into Hogsmede in groups of three. Remus was helping Lancaster with the spotting scopes when he saw them. "Harry there are at least twenty Death Eaters between The Hogs Head, the Three Broomsticks and Honeydukes." Hermione immediately apparated to the entrance of the little building across from the Three Broomsticks where she was surprised to be recognized by Ginny.

"Hermione?" Ginny was amazed to see her friend here, and even more surprised to see her wearing military fatigues.

"Not now Ginny," replied Hermione, not taking her eyes off the scene in the street.

"I thought you were in the States with your parents."

"Not now Ginny. Riddle is out there." She had said the magic words. The two women waited in silence. Two months of questions were answered in an instant for Ginny.

Back at the cave, Harry replied, "Find him."

Remus searched frantically as the Death Eaters began killing indiscriminately. Fifteen seconds later, there were bodies littering the street.

Voldemort stood outside as Bagman and Flint entered the Three Broomsticks and gave everyone ten seconds to get out. People began running.

“Got em,” said Shepherd. “He’s to the left of the Three Broomsticks in the center of the street standing by himself.”

A moment later, Ron and Lavender ran out of the pub. Voldemort saw the red head and turned to face him. At that moment, Ginny who had been watching with Hermione from across the street, burst out of the door and yelled, “Hey Tom, you shite.”

“Got, em.” Harry remembered everything that Lancaster had taught him, breathe, focus, squeeze.

Riddle never cast the killing curse on Ron or Lavender. In an instant, he looked around and raised his wand. “Avada...”

Thwack! Voldemort’s head literally exploded. Hermione ran over and immediately began casting the binding charm that Flitwick had taught her. Ginny screamed, “Incendio! Burn you bastard.” Flames shot out the end of her wand engulfing Riddle’s remains in a fiery inferno. For a minute they just stood there transfixed and watched as the body burned. Hermione added her own spell and the flames shot up higher.

In her anger, Ginny threw rocks at the burning body, and began sobbing over all of the pain he had caused her over the years. A crowd gathered on the other side of the street watching the scene in morbid fascination.

Neither witch saw Pettigrew come up behind them and grab Hermione. Thrusting his wand into her back, he said, “I don’t know what you did to him, but you’ll never see Potter ag...”

Thwack! As Hermione had stepped to the side, Harry had a clear shot and hit Pettigrew in the ribcage. He was thrown six feet by the impact and was dead before he’d hit the ground.

Thwack! Harry began hitting the other Death Eaters who were still killing people at different areas of the street.

Thwack! Ludo Bagman flew four feet with a gaping hole in his chest. He had helped set the Dursley's house on fire. Answering Voldemort's call that morning had turned out to be a bad bet. He had just killed Marietta Edgecombe.

Thwack! Marcus Flint's head exploded. He had killed Cho Chang moments before.

Thwack! Narcissa Malfoy flew four feet and flopped over. She had murdered Hannah Abbot's dad.

Thwack! Thomas Borgin's head exploded. The shopkeeper had set fire to the Dursley's home, helping murder Harry's aunt, uncle and cousin.

Thwack! Jackie McNair fell over. She had murdered Molly's sister many years earlier.

Harry had one round left in the big rifle. Thwack! Rookwood's father landed six feet away. He had murdered Susan's parents only days after she'd been born.

The remaining Death Eaters were captured or apparated away, still not certain of what had happened to their fellow Death Eaters. No one had heard the sound of the rifle over all of the noise.

Most of the people in town ignored the fallen Death Eaters or went up and kicked them. They gathered around the fire that was still burning in the center of the street outside the Three Broomsticks.

Moments later thirty Aurors, a handful of Mediwitches, Hammer and Bones appeared at Hogsmede. They took statements from various people who were there, and tended the wounded. There wasn't much to tell. No one who was there except Hermione knew exactly what had happened, or how Voldemort had died. No one except Ginny had a clue what spell had been cast that caused the Death Eaters to suddenly explode or fall. Anyone casually examining their bodies would conclude that they had been hit with a reducto charm.

Bones knew the truth, but didn't say anything. They collected eyewitness reports from twenty people who had seen the last minutes of Voldemort's reign or terror.

In total eight Death Eaters, Voldemort, fourteen students, and twenty villagers died within a four minute avalanche of terror. Thirty students had been injured, and nine other Death Eaters had been stunned by members of the DA.

Shepherd quickly gathered all of the equipment and apparated back to Grimmauld place with Harry. Remus went to the village to see the remains of Riddle, his former friend and to collect Hermione.

Two days later, Azkaban was nearly emptied. All Death Eaters serving life sentences were sent through the veil. Lucius Malfoy refused to ask for mercy and walked through on his own, showing much more courage than his son had ever displayed.

Less than a dozen people knew what had really happened. Remus, Amelia, Hammer, Dumbledore, Ginny, Hermione, Harry, Shepherd, McGonagall and little Professor Flitwick who had asked Harry for one of the big bullets to have as a souvenir.

The truth of the matter was that Harry had had a very difficult time coming to grips with the fact that he had taken nine lives in a four minute period of time. After the battle, Shepherd had portkeyed Harry back to Grimmauld place. Shepherd went back and cleaned up the hide, bringing the two rifles and empty casings back to Auror Headquarters. Hermione and Remus had not returned for several hours, and had miraculously stayed out of the newspapers. She had found Harry curled up in his vomit soaked bed, sobbing. She cleaned up the vomit and curled up behind him. When they got up the next day, Harry didn't say anything to anyone. Dan and Emma had spent

the day out in the park with Hermione, thinking that Harry wanted to be alone. He couldn't find the closure that he so desperately needed.

In truth Harry had spent so much time in the last year focusing on ridding the world of Voldemort that aside from an occasional conversation with Dan, Harry simply didn't know what to do next.

Harry and the Grangers went back to Nice for a month. He had wanted to purchase the Villa that they had rented previously that summer. Hermione pointed out that they haven't even been to most of the homes that he did own, and that they should think about it a while before buying another

They tried to find some order in their lives. For Harry, peace came when he was swimming in the shallow waters with Hermione, who had fun pretending to be a mermaid, wickedly seducing Harry in fifteen feet of water.

In December, Dan and Emma moved back into their own home. They made arrangements to resume their practice after the holidays. The time off had been good for their marriage, but they enjoyed their practice.

Harry was still torn with an enormous case of "now what?" Dan and Emma had encouraged Hermione to enroll at Oxford to learn investment management. Amelia had told them that they could have any position within the wizarding world that they wished whenever they felt ready.

A few days before Christmas, there was a knock on the door of the Granger house. Emma answered the door to find Professors Flitwick, McGonagall and Dumbledore standing outside.

"Please come in," said Emma. She was actually pleased to see the old wizard who had infuriated her so much the previous summer.

“Could we possibly speak with Harry?” asked Dumbledore, handing Emma Minerva’s traveling cloak.

“How can I help you Professors?” asked Harry, who was pleased to see the three of them again.

“Harry,” said Dumbledore. “We have come to formally invite you to return to the castle.

In truth, Harry had always loved the castle, but no longer cared for the idea of being a student. He began to decline.

Flitwick caught the misunderstanding early and said, “Dumbledore, you didn’t explain the offer.”

Dumbledore apologized. “Harry, I’m sorry for the misunderstanding. We would like you to come back to the castle in the position of full professor, teaching defense to the students. Kingsley has resigned to pursue other interests.”

“But I never finished...”

Minerva cut him off, “Potter, you more than finished your studies in Transfiguration, Charms, Defense, and I’m told that your ability to operate sophisticated muggle equipment has earned your four NEWTs, the minimum needed to qualify as a teaching professor at Hogwarts. The board of governors unanimously approved your application.”

“But I didn’t apply.”

Hermione said, “I filled it out for you. Harry, it’s what you love to do. We’ll have summers off to travel the world, and I’m told that the married staff living quarters are quite comfortable. You can still sneak out on weekends and play a few rounds with Dad.”

Harry looked like a fish out of water. “Married?”

Hermione said, “Well, I was hoping that we could wait until spring, but I’m ready anytime that you are.

Harry's eyes lit up like he'd just received the best news of his life.
"You are? This is great!"

McGonagall broke into an uncharacteristically wide grin. She asked,
"You'll accept the offer then?"

Harry said, "Yes, to both. I mean..."

"Breathe Harry," said Hermione giving him a huge hug and kiss.
"Your job starts in two weeks, and we'll get married in June. OK?"

"I do, I mean OK." Everyone smiled at the young couple who
deserved so much happiness.

A moment later, they were joined by Minister Bones. She said, "I
hope I'm not interrupting anything, but I wanted to make
arrangements for the presentation of some small tokens of the
Ministry's appreciation for Mr. Potter and Miss Granger's
extraordinary work in making the wizarding world a safer place."

Harry said "Thank you Minister, but..."

Bones shook her head, and said, "Harry no one who has been
awarded membership in the Order of Merlin has asked for the glory.
They did what needed to be done in a way that few people have been
willing to do. We know that it was never your or Hermione's desire to
kill Voldemort. It needed to be done, and you both accepted the
challenge. The award isn't a recognition of the deed, rather than an
affirmation about your and, if I'm correct, your fiancé's amazing
character. Surely you wouldn't deny her a well deserved moment of
recognition?"

"No, but..."

"Good. Dumbledore could we combine the awards with the returning
feasts on 3 January?"

"Of course. That would be splendid. How many other guests should I
plan for?"

“About a hundred.”

Dan and Emma sat there together watching the afternoon unfold, thinking about the mysteries of life. How six months ago a young man in ragged clothing stood up to his abusive relatives on a train platform. How he ran into Hermione, who as a little girl never took the time to make friends, and they just snapped together like matching pieces in a jigsaw puzzle.

Emma nodded in agreement and said, “Amazing. It’s just like magic.”

End

A/N

I hope that you enjoyed my little story. I had a lot of fun writing it and so very much fun conversing with old friend and new ones.

There are so many great stories to read – from widely known writers such as Full Pensive, Sloth, Kinsfire, RossWrock, or LS Song and lesser known ones such as ChemProf, OlafR, Bobmin356 and UdderPD. If you have a great story that you would like me to read, please email me.

I promise not to completely ignore or kill Ron off in any more of my stories.

Thanks for taking the time to write proper reviews. If you have a story that you like, please let me know.

O-C